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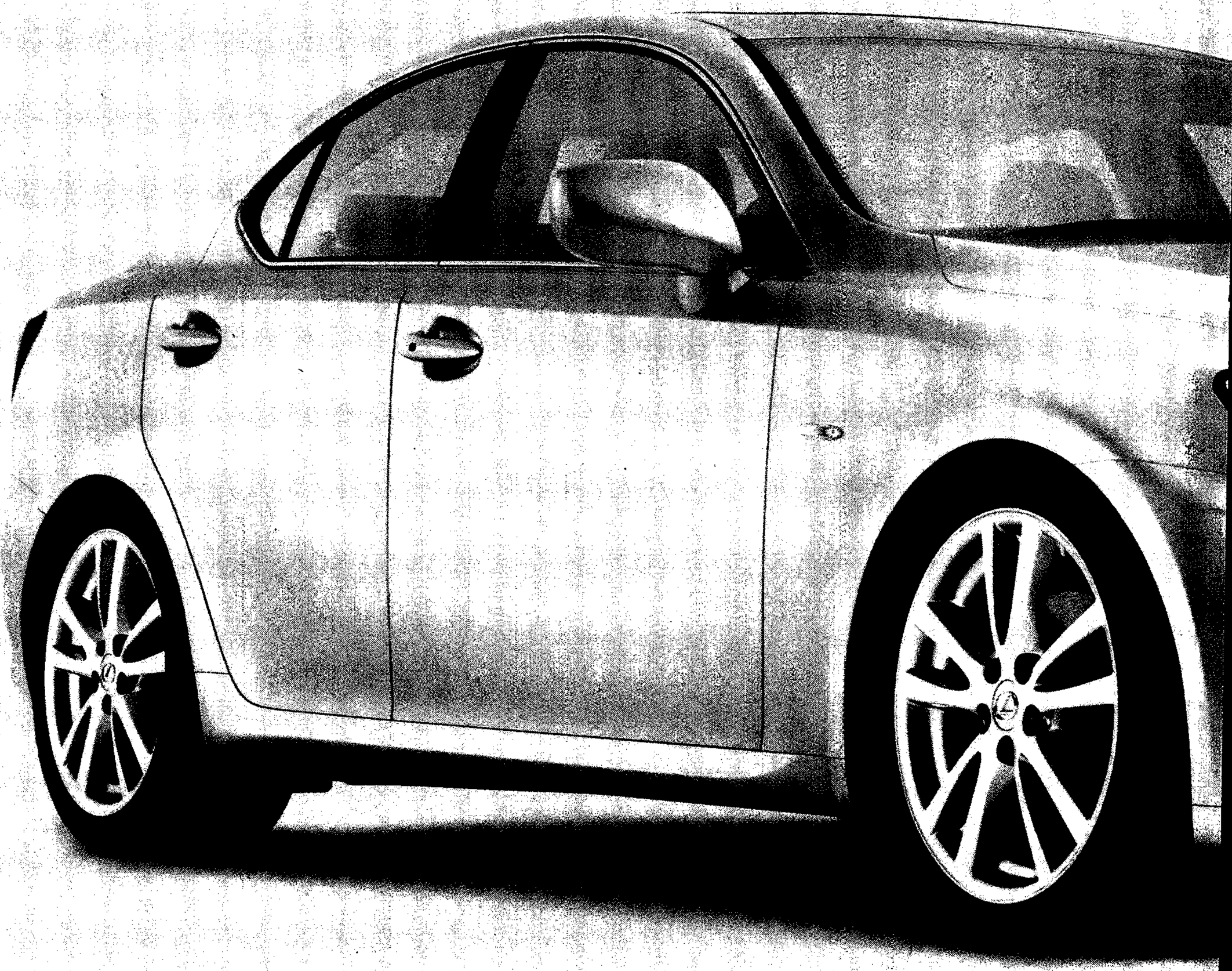

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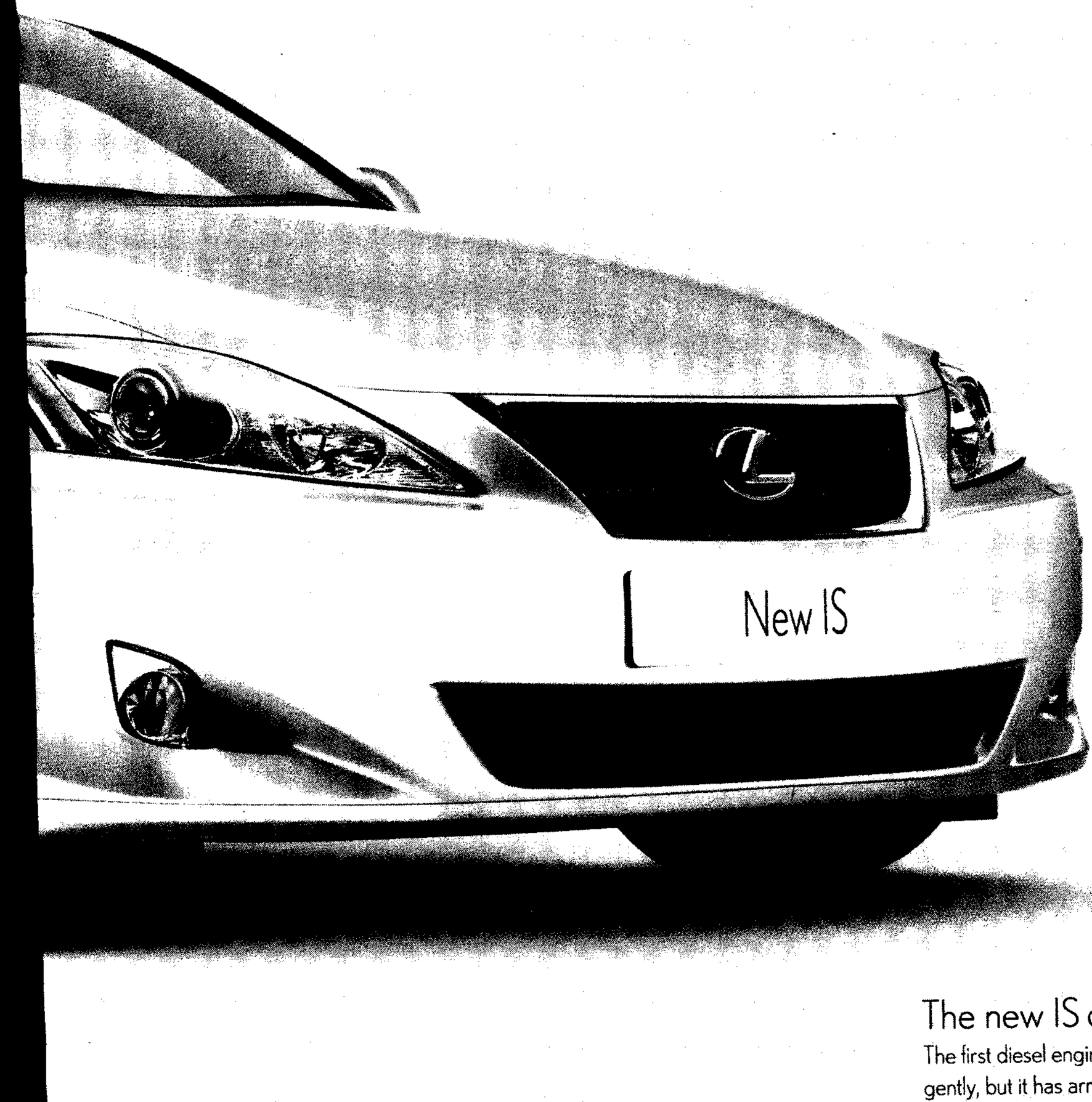

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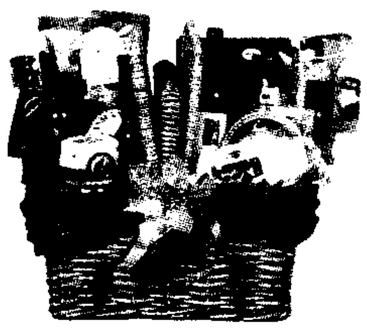
Gnome

THE SAD collapse of Gnomepak, the company of which until last Friday I had the honour to be Chairman, is a tragedy for everyone concerned. Millions of poor families handed over their hard-earned money in the hope of receiving one of our Scrooge Christmas Hamper Specials,



containing such festive luxury items as a tin of Gnome's Christmas Luncheon Meat, a miniature bottle of Cyprus Sherry from the Gnomassol vineyards, and a Yuletide Packet of one 'Gnome-made Mince Pie'.

Today these unhappy families will wake up on Christmas morning to find that their table is empty, through no fault of my own.

When I used their money to make a series of shrewd investments in other companies in my empire, such as Gnomeflop, Gnomeloss and Gnomebust, I had no idea that I would lose it all and then be found out.

The obvious culprit in this tragic and sorry tale is our bank, which outrageously refused to loan me a further £7 billion to tide me over until next Christmas, when I could find another few million suckers to give me all their money.

E. Strobes, pp Lord Gnome
Hotel Splendido, Las Hampas
Christmas Island.

***Gnomepak** – We're dreaming of a shite Christmas!*

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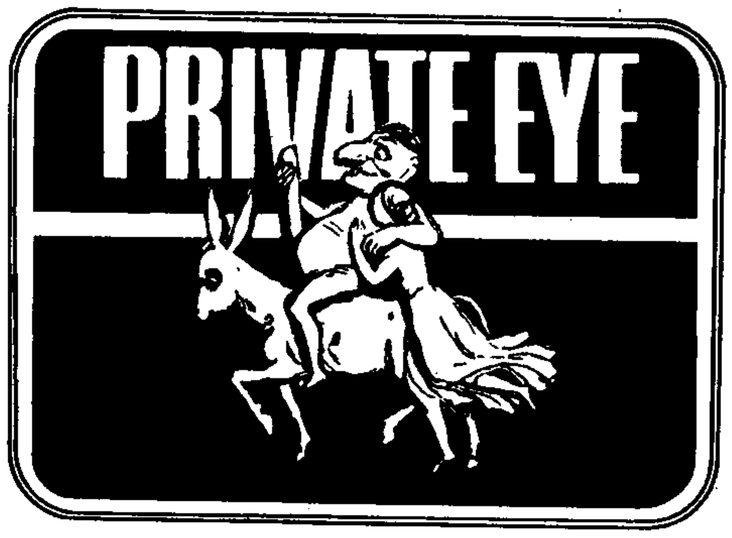

Inside: Blair (soon)

- **The hacks in thrall to Bondage** 8
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- **Bombs away: Postcard from Ulster** 11
- **Justice is bland in Grisham's latest** 27
- **Profiting from Third World jabs; plus quangos, criminal injuries & more** 29, 30

WHY was Farepak, the Christmas club scheme, unregulated and able to do what it wanted with savers' money?

Because under relentless pressure from the CBI and others for "light touch" regulation of business, the government has consistently left such companies to their own devices. This was despite several opportunities, such as the rewriting of financial regulations in 2000, to bring them under control.

And who was the CBI president in the late 1990s who vehemently opposed regulation, in 1999 calling for a "moratorium" on legislation and a "regulatory environment that is business friendly"? Yes, it was the multi-millionaire Farepak group chairman, Sir Clive Thompson! Step forward the Tory-supporting business leader who even the Tories now describe as the unacceptable face of capitalism!

The unacceptable face of capitalism and Sir Clive Thompson (left)

Of course if the government now wants a stick with which to beat Sir Clive, it should ask him where the 2005 accounts are for his family company, Barslondon. They should have been filed by 31 October and not to have done so is a criminal offence.

Sir Clive, unlike Farepak savers, should scrape by this Christmas as he has another private company, Storm Financial, which he used to receive his £100,000 chairman's fee from Farepak's collapsed parent, European Home Retail. This ensured he would not have to face a 40 percent income tax charge but a much lower corporation tax rate, after expenses. Very canny!

Meanwhile the government, in the shape of Trade Minister Ian McCartney, has been quick to label Farepak's collapse a "national emergency" and get on the phone to persuade the firm's bankers, a few supermarkets and even fellow MPs to have a whip-round for the victims. Prime minister-in-waiting Gordon Brown was soon on the TV screens offering a day of his own pay (gee, thanks).

What a contrast with the official response to the scores of corporate failures that have left around 125,000 workers and pensioners without the pensions they had paid into for decades. They haven't just had one Christmas spoilt but their entire retirements. And as their employers went bust before a lifeboat was set-up a couple of years ago, they've been left without a bean.

The big difference from Farepak is that the pension losses *were* in large part the government's fault, as determined in recent months by the Parliamentary Ombudsman and parliament's public administration committee, because of false promises and poor regulation over years.

Yet back in 2002 when Labour MP Derek Wyatt, representing staff of the collapsed Allied Steel and Wire, asked the government to make an ex-gratia payment to victims, the then pensions minister replied: "I would not like to give him false hope. Indeed, I cannot give him any hope." The stony-faced minister for whom hundreds of thousands going without pensions was nothing like the "national emergency" of a ruined Christmas? A certain Ian McCartney MP.

THE 2012 London Olympics are shaping up as a nice little earner for Britain's elite management consultants.

First came the successful bid, grossly under-priced to deny sceptics ammunition on financial grounds and based on early calculations of what the games would cost from Pricewaterhouse-Coopers.

At the same time the usual suspects were eagerly lining up behind the project. Deloitte supplied the bid's finance director and negotiated tax concessions on behalf of the London bid. The firm also recently took on the top civil servant at the Department of Culture, Dame Sue Street, whose contribution "on bringing the 2012 Olympics to London" was lavishly praised by Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell.

Rival Accenture was one of the £1m "premier partners" of the bid while McKinsey also provided support. KPMG produced a glowing report on the games' commercial potential for the London Chamber of Commerce.

Now it's pay-back time and the contracts are starting to roll in. Accenture has been awarded a deal of unspecified value to run the "back office" for the games (asked how much it was worth, the organising committee told the *Eye* "we don't give out figures"). Meanwhile KPMG is now busy racking up fees from the government working out how much the event will really cost.

All involved are desperate to sweep the embarrassing omission of VAT costs under the carpet, but the most pathetic excuse for the VAT-oversight came from Tessa Jowell herself: "The issue was not raised by PricewaterhouseCoopers, who advised us on the costs, nor were issues in relation to VAT at that point identified by the Treasury or by departmental accounting officers."

The Tories were keen to blame the glaring omission on all of the above except PwC, which also happens to be the country's largest firm of tax accountants. Could that be because just two weeks beforehand shadow Chancellor George Osborne had announced who would be advising his party on its tax plans? The chosen beancounters are none other than… the dunderheads from PwC!

PUTIN AT SUMMIT

NOW THAT the Vicar has decided to negotiate with the Syrian regime rather than ostracise it, Foreign Office wallahs wonder if he might belatedly wish to make use of their diplomatic skills.

Until five years ago Blair spent much time and effort trying to become Syria's bestest friend in the west, in the belief that the new young president Bashar al-Assad was, like him, a Third Way kind of guy devoted to modernisation. But throughout this diplomatic mating-dance he insisted on using his own freelance envoys, shunning all offers of help – and words of warning – from the FCO.

One was Lord Levy, the famous fundraiser, whose role as Blair's personal Middle-Eastern troubleshooter has caused endless annoyance in Whitehall over the years. He returned from his regular trips to Damascus convinced that Assad was a man Blair could do business with.

Another of the so-called "back channels" was Peter Mandelson, who enjoyed a three-hour chat with the president while holidaying in Syria in January 2001. The infatuated Mandy described it as "the most relaxed and honest exchange I am ever likely to have with a foreign head of state".

The next recruit was Mandy's friend Charles Powell, former flunkey to Lady Thatcher and brother of Blair's chief of staff. Blair dispatched Lord Powell to Damascus in September 2001 to see Assad and prepare the way for a prime ministerial trip.

Powell's involvement raised eyebrows because of a rather obvious potential conflict of interest: he also worked for Wafic Said, the Syrian-born billionaire. Only a few weeks before his diplomatic mission to Damascus, Powell and Said both addressed a conference at the Dorchester Hotel on the theme "Syria: A New Dawn for Business, Trade and Investment."

Brushing aside warnings from the Foreign Office that he should tread carefully in his dealings with Assad, Blair set off to meet him a few weeks after 9/11. On the day he arrived in Damascus, the *Independent* carried a gushing article about Assad by Mandelson. "Bashar is an intelligent and cultured individual," he raved. "Like so many leaders of his type and generation, he is looking for a fresh paradigm for his country."

Seduced by the siren voices of Powell and Mandy, Blair felt confident that the Syrian president would join his new crusade and sign up to the "war against terrorism". It would go down in history as a sensational diplomatic triumph.

Woe and disaster! Blair's "expert" go-betweens had misled him. Assad gave the PM a humiliating public rebuff in Damascus, praising Islamic suicide-bombers and likening their struggle to that of the French resistance against the Nazis. There was further embarrassment on a return visit to London two months later, when Assad described his host as "an ostrich that buries its head in the sand".

Relations with Syria have been on ice ever since. With a thaw in prospect, it remains to be seen if Blair will make the same mistakes all over again.

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

15 Nov 2006, 3.35pm: Tony Blair tells House of Commons about his new bill to "protect the public from violent offenders and anti-social behaviour".

15 Nov 2006, 3.52pm: Tony Blair tells House of Commons that David Cameron will "come within the reach of a big clunking fist, and you know what, he will be out on his feet, carried out of the ring".

SHOULD we be surprised that things have already gone awry with the London 2012 Olympics?

Press relations for the London Olympic Delivery Authority are being run by one Godric Smith whose previous job was… chief spokesman for Tony Blair!

Street of Shame

"STAMP out the Christmas Killjoys!" shrieked the *Sun* last December, launching a campaign to "stop politically-correct Scrooges killing off Christmas".

"We launched our campaign as a new report revealed that Christmas in the workplace is rapidly disappearing," the paper observed. "Around 70 percent of bosses have banned festive decorations – in case they upset minority staff… Lollipop ladies in Derbyshire and South Yorkshire have been banned from putting tinsel on their signs. Staff at Peterborough Jobcentre were banned from putting up decorations and exchanging presents publicly in case they upset Muslims."

Last week Sky TV, the *Sun*'s sister company, announced that its traditional staff Christmas do on 8 December would henceforth be known as the "Winter Party" after complaints from two employees. Can it expect a visit from the *Sun*'s "mobile nativity bus", with revellers ready to slap a "Crimbo – our festive version of an Asbo" on boss James Murdoch?

"FUCK! Shit! Really? No! Fucking hell!" *Observer* staff have come to recognise this as the clarion cry of editor Roger Alton on a busy news day.

But what was so vexing Alton this time? A ministerial resignation, an al-Qaeda attack, a shock sports result perhaps?

Er, no. It was the news that Britney Spears was divorcing her second husband after only two years of marriage. No doubt the late David Astor, another legendary *Observer* editor, would have responded in just the same fashion.

***FT* chief executive Rona Fairhead clearly believes that, now the paper is back in profit after a year of belt-tightening including the sacking of 54 hacks, rewards are in order.**

Eye 1161 revealed how Ms Fairhead had, upon her appointment last May, ordered her predecessor's office to be ripped out and a larger one built in its place – even though the previous chief exec's office had itself only just been completely refurbished. At the same time, the Street of Shame's grandest chief exec also ordered that a second office, complete with Sky TV and internet access, be provided for her chauffeur.

Now that the new offices have been completed, there remains the question of what to put in them. Only the best will do for Rona. She has ordered the ultimate zekky chair, costing a bum-numbing £11,500, on which to rest her very important bottom.

CHARLES "Lord Snooty" Moore springs gallantly to the defence of his old boss Conrad Black.

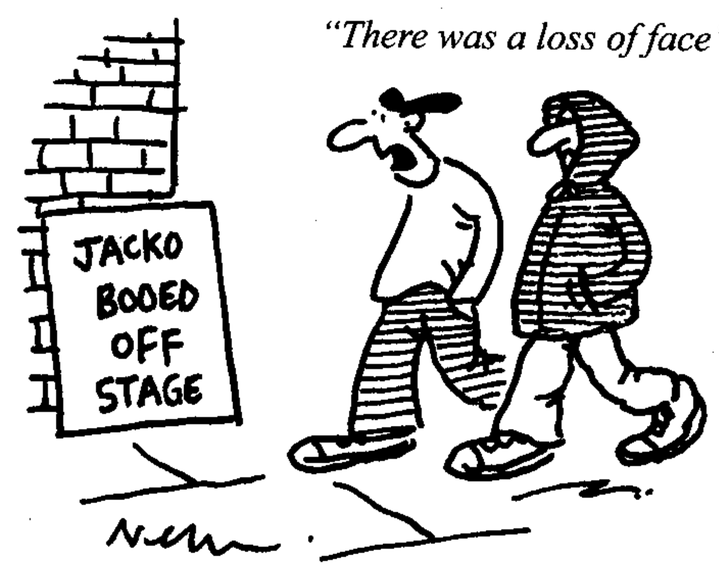
Black loved quality newspapers, Moore writes in the latest *Spectator*, and preferred talented mavericks to apparatchiks. "Think of the editors he appointed – notably Peregrine Worsthorne, Max Hastings…"

Shome mishtake, shurely? Worsthorne and Hastings were both chosen by Andrew Knight, the then chief executive of the *Torygraph* empire. At the time of their appointment Black had never heard of them!

AS BEFITS the editor of the *Grauniad*, Alan Rusbridger cycles to work from Kentish town every morning. He thus establishes his green credentials and keeps his new, super-svelte figure in trim.

But, as *Grauniad* editor, he is also obliged to attend functions most evenings, at which drink may be taken. What to do? Simple: he sends his bicycle home by taxi for the following morning!

"There was a loss of face"



IN THE *Independent on Sunday*'s latest environmental special edition, there was much thunderous prose about how the planet is doomed unless we change our ways.

When it comes to saving the *Sindie*, however, traditional methods are preferred. The poor endangered polar bear on p13 was flipped on his side to make room for an ad for a car on one side and an ad for an airline on the other. There was another car ad – for Jaguar – on the next page.

At a quick count that's six car ads, three for airlines and one for central heating, in one paper. How groovily green can you get?

TRINITY Mirror's problems in Ireland are stacking up following the news that Sly Bailey is to axe the *People*'s operations on the Emerald Isle. The company is now facing a lawsuit from Lindsay Fergus, news editor of the Irish *Daily Mirror*, who is consulting Irish lawyers after being threatened by her boss, editor John Kierans.

The trouble flared last month when Fergus told Kierans that she had a hospital appointment. "Kierans flew into a rage," says an insider. "He called her a fucking cunt and told her that if she went to the hospital she could fuck off and not bother coming back." Legal papers are now being prepared in Dublin, with Fergus making a number of serious claims about her treatment over the past two years. A letter from her lawyers has already landed on the desk of Eugene Duffy, the *Mirror*'s managing editor in London.

OLDER *Telegraph* readers worried that the essential values of the paper were being lost in the rush towards the brave new world of podcasts, blogs and click-and-carry have been reassured by the multi-media extravaganzas which have graced the paper's website in recent weeks.

At the end of October hackette Rebecca Newman "investigated" the issue of ill-fitting underwear by taking a video crew along with her to two shops where she was filmed having her 32DD breasts measured and trying on a number of bras (complete with a "picture gallery" of a number of other young ladies modelling the latest designs from Rigby & Peller for comparative purposes).

On 6 November her colleague Bryony Gordon donned a succession of extremely short skirts to deliver her video diary of a week "living like Posh Spice", as well as taking a photographer along with her to record what she looked like when being sprayed with fake tan. And arrival of the latest James Bond film was marked with a slideshow of "the very best of the Bond girls" to have faced "the randy spy".

THEN **NOW**

TALKING DIRTY DES

WITH redundancies galore looming, galley-slaves at Express Newspapers are preparing for the worst and looking around for alternative sources of income.

One enterprising young hack has launched a lucrative sideline in hot food. With no canteen facilities on offer after 5pm in Dirty Desmond's HQ, starving night workers are lining up for seafood chowder, game stew and bean casserole with dumplings. There are exotic salads to be had too with chicken marinated in lime and garlic.

And the chef behind this life-saving enterprise? None other than Neil Chapman, who used to write the "Neil's Meals" column in the *Daily Star*'s TV mag – until it was axed in a previous Desmond round of cuts in April 2003!

Still, at least the *Daily Express* hasn't lost its appetite for top-notch exclusives. "Hollywood film mogul Harvey Weinstein addressed one of Britain's most influential charities at an awards and fundraising dinner in London last night," the paper blathered recently in an article that was exclusive in the sense that no other paper bothered to report it. Undeterred, the *Express* filled a whole column with the news, headlined "Hollywood Comes to Norwood" – Norwood being the charity in question.

Alas, Weinstein got fewer column inches than his fellow-speaker, the Norwood president; and most of the story was devoted to an adulatory account of this shy and selfless hero's charitable work over the years.

Who he? Step forward… Richard "Dirty" Desmond!

Over at the ailing *Sunday Express*, meanwhile, editor Martin Townsend has remained strangely silent over job cuts at his title. But close students of his pisspoor column "A Word from the Editor" may have noticed this strange observation last weekend: "Millions are being wasting [*sic*] on busybodies obsessing over the status of a banana."

Apart from the obvious literal (a consequence of sacking most of the sub-editors), might this by any chance by referring to "Dirty" Desmond's obsessive ritual of having a banana delivered on a silver salver by his liveried butler each day at 4pm?

Equally curious was a recent item in the daily's "essential gossip column", Day & Night. In among stories about such happening people as, er, Joan Collins, Rod Stewart and Ringo Starr, it noted that: "The *Evening Standard* describes itself as 'London's Quality Newspaper.' Quality is debatable but quantity certainly is lacking: paid-for sales are down by more than 20 percent over the past year… The boss, young Viscount Rothermere, does not seem unduly bothered. He does pop into the office occasionally, often with his Labrador Edward, but mostly he is preoccupied with beautifying his splendid new £40m Palladian mansion in Dorset. Talk about fiddling while Rome burns." Ouch!

And what provoked this bout of pot and kettle rattling, which appears to breach the non-aggression pact negotiated between the two proprietors (Desmond won't mention Rothermere's bastard child if Rothermere keeps quiet about Des's porn empire)? Could it be an innocuous paragraph on the media pages of the previous night's *Standard* in which Roy Greenslade noted the *Express*'s similar slide in readers as its proprietor fires 10 percent of the staff, and asked: "Is Richard Desmond living in the real world?"

One man who is definitely living in the real world is the *Daily Express*'s editor, Peter "Mentally" Hill, who has once again fallen foul of the security measures at the newspaper's Lower Thames Street bunker.

Turning up to work in his executive Smart car (a replacement for the editor's chauffeur-driven Bentley which went when cost-conscious Desmond took over), Hill was outraged to be detained while a new security guard checked his vehicle and staff ID.

"Don't you know who I am?" demanded the red-faced editor. "Yes," came the reply. "You're a silly little man in a silly little car."

BONDBALLS

A Licence To Overkill

AS Fleet Street goes into a frenzy of ecstasy following glowing reviews for Daniel Craig's performance as the new Bond, readers of some papers must be scratching their heads...

Mistaken identity

"I like to think of myself as open-minded, but Daniel Craig as the new James Bond? Come off it," tutted Emma Parker-Bowles in the *Sun* on 21 October 2005. "Bond is meant to be tall and dark, not small and blond, 007 not 003½."

On 6 April the paper itself weighed in with an editorial, no less, entitled "Shames Bond". It complained that Craig "can't drive a car with a clutch and a gear stick. He has to wear a life jacket for a boat ride on the Thames. Now he's being taught how to play cards."

The *Mirror* was equally scornful, devoting its own editorial on the day Craig's casting was announced to the "deadly debut" of a man they termed "Potatohead". "The sixth James Bond is not from the same mould as the previous five. He isn't as smooth. He isn't as charming. And, even more shockingly, the man is BLOND," the paper tutted.

But what is this, after the release this month of *Casino Royale?* "Daniel Craig is the best Bond since Connery," gushed the *Sun*. "Craig's performance is so strong he could even make moviegoers forget there was anyone between himself and Connery. He plays the gritty, tougher-than-nails secret agent novelist Ian Fleming meant the world to see. With his bulked-up frame, intense blue eyes and don't-mess-with-me attitude, Craig makes Brosnan look a big girlie in comparison."

The *Mirror* was equally carried away. "Easily the franchise's best film since GoldenEye, it's 144 minutes of non-stop, wall-to-wall action. Daniel Craig – the man with the golden hair, whose casting provoked an outcry among fans – is simply brilliant."

Shaken and stirred

"A YOUNG James Bond fanatic was left shaken – stirred, even – when Judi Dench asked him to escort her to the premiere of the latest 007 movie." – *Express*, 11 November

"ACTOR Daniel Craig has admitted he was left shaken and stirred by criticism of his selection as the new James Bond." – *Mirror,* 7 November

"PREPARE to be shaken AND stirred – by attending the world premiere of the year's hottest movie!" – *Sunday Mirror*, 5 November

"I'VE just been left shaken and very stirred after hitting the motoring jackpot. I'm the only journalist in the world to drive James Bond's car from the Casino Royale movie." – *Sun*, 4 November

"Movie bosses hope the Royals will be left shaken and stirred at the VIP viewing of Daniel Craig's debut as James Bond in Casino Royale." – *Express*, 15 October

"Unshaven but not stirred: James Bond star Daniel Craig looked more like a tramp than the suave superspy of Casino Royale, as he was snapped out in London in a baseball cap and a pair of combats." – *Daily Star*, 6 October

"This 007 leaves you shaken and stirred: Film with Derek Malcolm" – *Evening Standard, 16 November*

"A Bit Shaken, But Hardly Stirred: Cinema" – *Sunday Telegraph, 19 November*

Bond vs. Borat

The *Sun* used the release of *Casino Royale* as an excuse to dedicate an entire double-page spread to… *Borat*, even though Sacha Baron Cohen's film had already been in cinemas for a fortnight. "Bond V. Borat: We compare the two big movies" cried the headline over a piece in which Kazakhstani, Jewish, black and American cinemagoers were asked their opinion of the Borat film – but not the Bond one, which they hadn't seen.

Why the late plug? Surely not because 20th Century Fox, the film company owned by *Sun* proprietor Rupert Murdoch, produced *Borat*, and its run at number one in the box office chart is almost certain to end with the release of the latest 007 offering?

Licence to yawn

"Dani's got a licence to thrill: This wannabe Bond girl shows the form to turn 007's head" – *Daily Star, 14 November*

"Brand New Bond has a Licence to Sell" – *FT*, 14 November

"Bond's tuxedo, as worn by Daniel Craig, has a licence to kill your bank balance, at a massive £2,995." – *Express*, 13 November

"Now you too can win a licence to thrill and drive away in this beautiful Aston Martin V8 Vantage thanks to our HowLo? Reverse Auction" – *Mirror*, 13 November

"Get your own licence to thrill with designs inspired by Bond" – *Sunday Mirror*, 12 November

"James Bond fans who can't have a licence to kill can now at least get a licence-plate to die for." – *Daily Mail*, 11 November

"How to live life 007-style, home or abroad... I certainly had a licence to chill at the hotel's superbly appointed spa." – *Sun*, 11 November

"Christmas Ad campaign: Licence to spend: Dame Shirley steps in with Bond-style glamour" – *Guardian*, 8 November

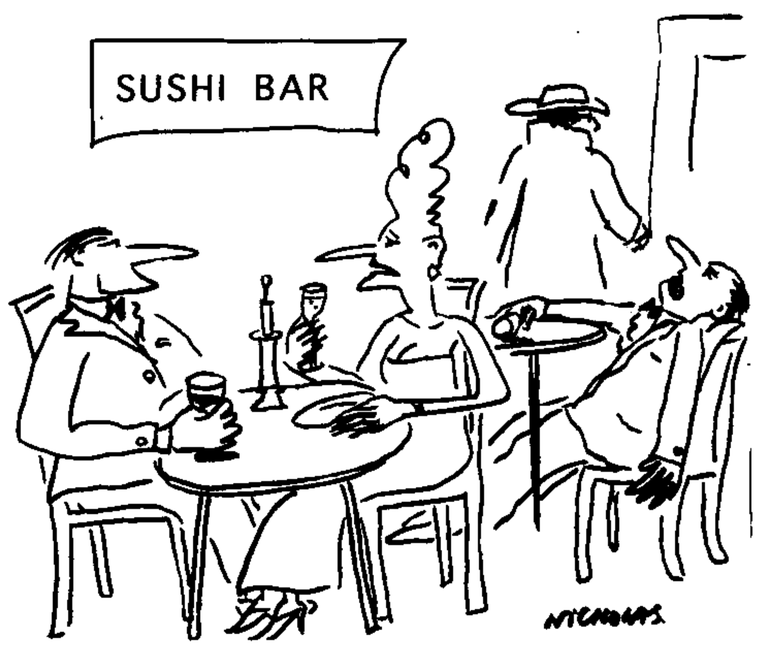
"Former James Bond Pierce Brosnan is exercising his licence to kill a proposed gas terminal." – *Daily Mail*, 24 October

"DANIEL IS LICENSED TO SWELL; 007 whipped in the privates" – *Star*, 8 November

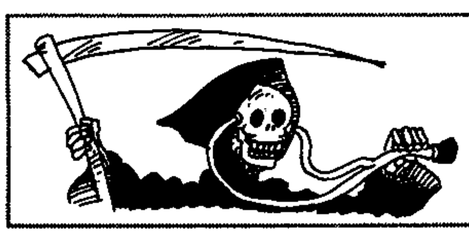
"Licence to drill for Dan: Daniel Craig has taken time out from playing James Bond – to soundproof an old pal's garage." – *Sun, 17 November*

Golden Shoehorn Award

Runners-up in the golden shoehorn award for the most gratuitous Bond reference in an unrelated article are Tony Banks of the *Express* for his remarks on Chelsea's midfield diamond formation – "Michael Essien took a leaf out of James Bond's book last night as he declared that for Chelsea, diamonds are forever" – and the *Sun*'s Andy Russell for describing an ATM scam in Manchester as using "James-Bond style technology from gangsters in the Ukraine". The winner, however, is Martin Baker of the *Daily Telegraph*'s business pages, for this introduction to an interview on 9 November: "You don't have to be a James Bond fan to understand this one: Gerry Acher took a long drive in a vintage Aston Martin, and found himself both shaken and stirred by the experience. But Acher, 61, wasn't escaping black-suited henchmen, blowing up the master villain's command-and-control centre, nor trying to get the girl. At the time he made his he was head of audit for KPMG worldwide."

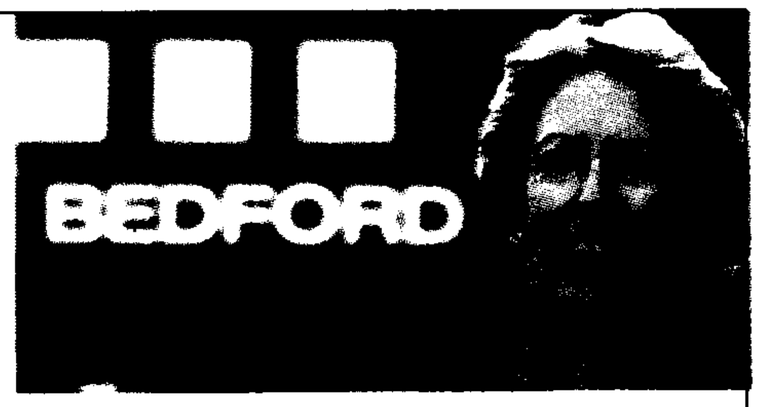


"I never watch James Bond movies... they're too far-fetched"



HEALTH SPECIAL

MEDICINE BALLS



A Day Out in Bedford

WOULD anyone who hasn't visited Bedford hospital please stand up?

With just three years to go before the next election, the staff have been hit with the triple whammy of Health Secretary Patsy Hewitt (accompanied by the chief executive of the NHS, David "Nibbler" Nicholson), Tory chairman Francis Maude and Lib Dem Shadow Health Secretary Steve Webb. And that was just October. So much for butting out of local NHS decisions.

The cause of the furore is not just the hospital's record debt, which saw it plummet from three stars to no stars, but rather the intention of long-serving dermatologist Barry Monk to stand for parliament under the "Save Bedford Hospital" ticket in a key Labour marginal. As Monk puts it: "Two years ago we were one of the best hospitals in the country and our books balanced. Now we face a deficit of £16m, half of which arose because we were doing too much work, the other half because of penalties through overspending and redundancy payments."

Maude's visit was low key and Webb didn't even warrant a trust press release but Patsy got the full treatment, organised by the trust's new communications officer, Vivienne "Kiwi fruit" Allan. A meeting with staff was arranged with the curtain drawn across an open door in case Patsy needed to make a quick exit. Staff were reassured there was no plan to close the hospital. Oddly, Dr Monk didn't receive his invitation but the BBC attempted to interview the UNISON rep. In a feat of exemplary PR, Ms Allan hijacked the interview and banned the BBC from the site. All caught on camera and broadcast locally. As the *Eye* went to press, it emerged that Allan had resigned suddenly.

Doubtless Patsy will be reassuring every hospital threatened with closure, and not just those where the sitting Labour MP has a majority of just 3,476. Dr Monk has asked the Tories and Lib Dems to stand aside, so he can deliver the killer blow, but the Lib Dems are holding out with their own "Save Bedford Hospital" campaign. Meanwhile, the trust's latest cost-cutting plan is to get rid of 26 of its 60 medical secretaries and replace them with an overseas transcription company, MedQuist, which is currently facing legal action from US hospitals and medical centres over allegations of overcharging.

Most hospitals can survive the loss of the odd doctor or two, but take away the secretaries and they fall to pieces. A final decision about redundancies is tactfully planned for 21 December. Meanwhile Patsy is clearly tiring of trying to explain how record investment in the NHS can lead to record debt. Despite all the extra money spent on "turnaround teams", the number of heavily indebted trusts has risen from 52 to 143 with a predicted deficit of £1.2bn.

Patsy has now asked her national clinical directors to earn their czars (sorry) by setting out the medical case for reconfiguration. The theory is that it sounds more credible coming from doctors than politicians. But as M.D. pointed out (see last Balls), reconfiguration may be necessary but it's nine years too late. And given the obscene amounts of money wasted on the continuous, ill thought out reform programme and the unnecessary private competition, the smart money's on Dr Monk.

M.D.

1. NHS plc

THE MAN responsible for appointing the trust directors who run the NHS is certainly doing his bit to hand it over to the private sector.

Sir William Wells, chairman of the NHS Appointments Commission, also happens to chair the Advisory Board of the Department of Health's Commercial Directorate (itself run by American private health enthusiast Ken Anderson). But Wells doesn't limit himself to providing Anderson with wise counsel, as demonstrated by a letter to trust directors, whose details the *Eye* understands he accessed from the Appointments Commission database (Sir William didn't return a call to answer the accusation).

"I am writing to you not to trumpet past success but to raise your awareness of future potential," drooled Sir William, helpfully enclosing a DVD which "tells a story of the ideas which drive the organisation". Showing a sure touch with the latest jargon he then asked the directors to "seriously consider how the Commercial Directorate can add value to your work".

If Sir William adopts an equally commercial approach to the trust board appointments he supervises, anyone vaguely sceptical of hiving off the NHS to the private sector clearly need not apply.

2. Big Bucks

ALONG with thousands of job losses, NHS "reconfiguration" is throwing up some juicy opportunities for health executives who fancy cashing in as much better-paid consultants.

One outfit selling the NHS's own experience back to it for a healthy profit is a consultancy firm called Durrows. Among its seven ex-NHS executives is the former chief executive of Bucks Hospitals Trust, Ruth Harrison, who left the health service a few days before a critical report on her trust. She has now turned up as a consultant for Durrows which, by a strange coincidence, was employed by Bucks Hospitals Trust in 2004 when Harrison was running the show, while the firm's website shows it still counts the trust among a handful of NHS customers.

Another is Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust – whose chief executive, Derek Smith, happens to be Ruth Harrison's husband.

Harrison's arrangement appears positively arm's length, however, next to the dual commitments of fellow Durrows consultant John Blakesley. He manages to be a Durrows consultant while being Director of Performance and Delivery at the Bucks trust at the same time!

3. BT con-tract

NO SOONER had the last *Eye* reported BT's dismal progress as contractor for the whole of London on the NHS National Programme for IT than the company released its half-yearly results and again pretended all was fine.

"BT continue to make good progress on its NHS NPfIT contracts," it claimed. All BT would say about the largest of these contracts was that "In London, where we are the Local Service Provider, BT has delivered capability to 40 percent of trusts." These are about as misleading as statements to the stock market come.

The "capability" delivered to trusts is almost entirely in the relatively simple and un-remunerative business of IT systems for GPs' surgeries. And, even on this score, the company has delivered less than a fifth of what Accenture achieved on its comparable contracts before it quit the programme, admitting to having lost £200m.

On the main part of the contract, systems for the large acute hospitals, BT has installed just one administration system and no clinical system when it should have put in scores of both. It has spent hundreds of millions yet achieved nothing in this respect since April when it emerged it had recovered just 1 percent of its massive outlay. Meanwhile it has ditched its software supplier and is now starting again with another, posing serious questions over the value of its expenditure.

If BT presents a rosy picture on such a disaster of a contract, City analysts might wonder how reliable the stellar results of the rest of its burgeoning "BT Global" IT division (profits up £23m on the same period last year) really are.

4. Brief encounter

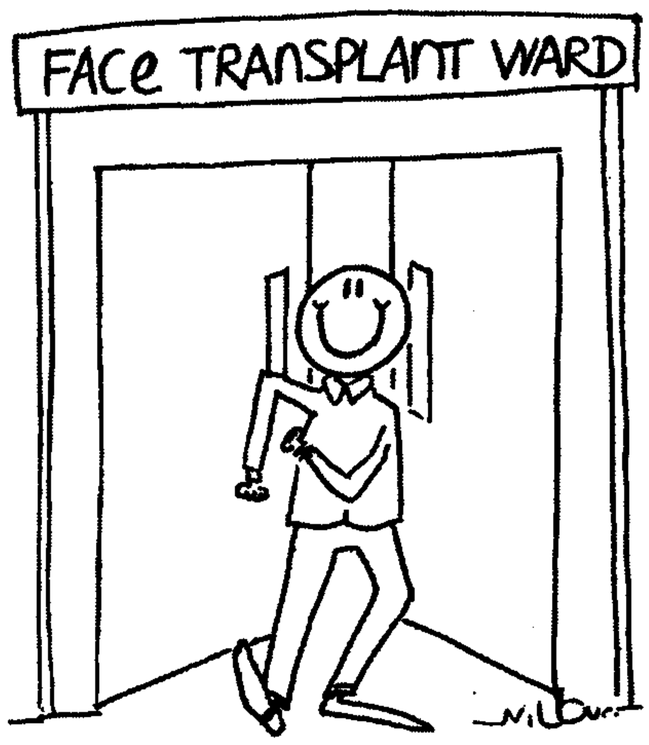
BEFORE last month's NHS protest in Westminster by medics, health staff and patients, Labour's health team tried to reassure MPs with a briefing on the "success" of the government's health reforms.

The seven-page "confidential" paper, *Better Care for Patients, Better Value for Money*, took New Labour spin to dizzy new heights; but ministers and MPs nevertheless trotted out its idiotic contents whenever worried constituents buttonholed them about hospital closures, job cuts or the demise of the NHS.

Thus everyone heard that only 903 people had lost their jobs in the NHS – conveniently ignoring the other 19,000 jobs that have gone or are going through "natural wastage, voluntary redundancy and freezing services and posts". It also ignores the nurses, midwives and health workers who have just finished training and cannot find a job.

The paper also made the extraordinary claim that: "There is no evidence to suggest that PFI schemes are driving NHS Trusts into deficit." Really? Try telling that to hospitals like the **Queen Elizabeth in Greenwich** which at one stage was putting nearly half its £19m deficit down to a PFI contract it could not afford. It's now facing a projected deficit of £37m – a third of its budget – and has been officially branded "technically bankrupt". Bed closures and the loss of nearly 200 posts were among measures to slash its deficits; and managers are looking to make further savings of £6.4m this year, which unions have warned will inevitably affect patients.

On the subject of new **Independent Treatment Centres**, the paper makes equally spurious claims. It says: "400,000 people have been taken off hospital waiting lists since 1997, with 114,000 (one in four) having had their operation in an ISTC…" Given that the NHS carries out around 6m elective operations a year, it is a ludicrous boast to make on behalf of the ISTCs which only opened in 2003, long after the lists had begun coming down.



MPs began queuing before dawn last Wednesday to reserve their favourite Commons seats for the Queen's Speech debate.

The first arrival, well before 7am, was Tory MP Tony Baldry, who later told the House that MPs were entering "a gap year, a strange parliamentary vacuum with the government treading water'". It was, he thundered, "no way to run a country".

Who better than Baldry to lecture colleagues on how politicians should behave? In the newly revised register of members' interests he once again shows that representing one's constituents needn't be a full-time job. He lists no fewer than 13 paid directorships in companies ranging from property development through agriculture to oil and gas exploration. They include a venture capital firm in Africa and an investment company specialising in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. On top of all that, he's a practising barrister, arbitrator and mediator.

This prosperous legislator has come a long way since January 1997, when as an agriculture minister in the Major government he was in such dire financial straits that he had to borrow £5,000 from a solicitor friend, Sarosh Zaiwalla. He later had to apologise to the House for not registering the loan, or mentioning it when he recommended Zaiwalla for an honour just 12 days after receiving the cash.

Even now, however, he sometimes suffers from forgetfulness. Last summer the committee on standards and privileges investigated his dealings with the Sierra Leone government in his capacity as chairman of the Commons international development committee. Although it found no evidence that he had sought to exploit his public position to further his private business, it criticised him for not declaring all his financial interests in Sierra Leone when writing to the international development secretary and not properly registering his shareholding in a firm called Red Eagle Resources (chairman: Tony Baldry MP), which invests in the country. Overall, the committee concluded that he had "failed to exercise sufficient care" in distinguishing his public concerns as an MP from his private interests. Once again, Baldry had to apologise to the House.

Baldry's constituents in Banbury may wonder how he manages to be such a busy, globe-trotting businessman while also serving as a conscientious MP. No doubt he'd reply that a chap has to do something to pass the time during a "gap year".

"He is a towering political figure. He is a man of great intellect and great integrity. He is a man of vision. He's just so much a man who in every way has the capability of becoming a great prime minister, as Tony Blair has been."

MARGARET BECKETT
on Gordon Brown
Sunday Telegraph

Submitted by J. James

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

"PLEASE give what you can to support Alan's campaign for deputy," pleads the official website for Alan Johnson MP, revealing that donations can be made online via Paypal. "Paypal account is in the name of the Johnson for deputy campaign trustee, K. Milner."

An odd choice of trustee if Johnson wants to sell himself as a fresh face untainted by the sleaziness of New Labour. Having worked for Gordon Brown before the 1997 election and then joined the lobbying firm GJW, this selfsame Karl Milner was caught bang to rights by the *Observer*'s "Lobbygate" exposé in 1998.

To impress a potential client from a US energy company (who was actually undercover reporter Greg Palast), he handed over an embargoed select committee report on the energy industry. "We have many friends in government," he boasted. "They like to run things past us some days in advance, to get our view, to let them know if they have anything to be worried about, maybe suggest some changes."

He also explained to Palast how American energy companies could manipulate British ministers. "There are ways round it. The way that you go about it is that you play on the existing prejudices in the Cabinet for coal, you play on the existing prejudices within the Cabinet for competition, and you play the forces off against each other. It's intimate knowledge of what's going on that produces results in the end. That's how GJW makes money."

Milner was officially reprimanded by his employers, who also had to apologise to the industry select committee for leaking its report before publication. He now lives in Yorkshire, where he lectures on public relations at Leeds Business School.

A few years ago Milner was also a member of Labour's "1000 Club", a fundraising body that offered privileged access to ministers in return for an annual gift of at least £1,000. Can donors to the Johnson campaign expect similar treatment?

A SMOOTH-CHINNED, once-familiar face is spotted around Westminster, looking furtive. It belongs to former Labour MP and Blairite minister Chris Leslie, who lost his seat at the last general election.

Leslie was one of those people who was "not meant" to win a seemingly safe Tory seat in 1997 but washed up high on the shore in the Blair tide. He then found his career bedevilled by a small majority.

Leslie has been spotted around Westminster a lot recently, particularly in the environs of the Treasury. Is he courting Gordon Brown's support to find a vacant Labour seat? It is a sign of his application that he even attended the recent launch of a volume of the chancellor's speeches. If a man is prepared to countenance such stupendously boring fare, he really must be devoted.

Leslie was one of the (few) competent parliamentary performers in Blair's lower ministerial ranks, and Brown could use modernisers like him. So… watch this space.

MISLEADING a court is a pretty serious matter – just ask onetime Tory jailbirds Jeffrey Archer and Jonathan Aitken. But this is what wannabe Deputy Prime Minister Peter Hain is effectively being accused of by a Northern Ireland high court judge.

Mr Justice Girvan ruled on 9 November that Hain had breached equality legislation by appointing as Victims Commissioner a woman nominated by Rev Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party. He also concluded that the government had tried to cover up the role played by Paisley's party.

The judge said Hain had "failed in his duty of candour to the court" and called for an "immediate and searching inquiry at a high level". The government has not yet formally responded to Mr Justice Girvan. Who knows: Blair goes down for cash for honours, maybe Peter will get the cell next door!

Number crunching

15 ■ Number of times Gordon Brown mentioned climate change in budget and pre-budget report this year

11 ■ Total number of times Gordon Brown has mentioned climate change in previous 8 years

THE political consensus on PFI seemed finally to have broken down when Tory Shadow Health Minister Andrew Lansley issued a press release at the end of last month headed: "Lunacy as Labour wastes £53bn on hospital projects".

Lansley learnt via parliamentary questions that PFI hospital schemes mean Labour (ie taxpayers) will be paying this exorbitant sum for hospitals worth just £8bn.

Many of his criticisms will be familiar to readers. He described profiteering when "private sector firms involved in the PFI projects will benefit from a massive 540 per cent return on the initial agreement." He also highlighted the cost to an NHS already struggling with deficits and job cuts, and pointed to the inflexibility when "PFI has turned into a straitjacket" with hospitals "locked into long-term contracts for the building of large hospitals that we have no idea whether the NHS will actually need".

Lansley ended by calling "for a fundamental review of how the NHS accesses capital for future investment". So *Private Eye* asked the Conservative party if this meant it had abandoned the PFI, a scheme which it had invented (before Labour enthusiastically embraced it). David Willets, one of the brains behind PFI is in David Cameron's shadow cabinet; and Lansley himself was in the Conservative Research Department when the Tories announced the first big expansion of PFI that led to work on schemes like the Norfolk & Norwich hospital. An honest change of mind would be perfectly honorable, and a real parliamentary debate might stop PFI being the only game in town. Sadly, it seems that after winning a few headlines with Lansley's attack, the Conservatives have retreated from the criticism. A spokesperson told the *Eye* that, for all his talk of lunacy and straitjackets, Lansley was "not taking a pop at PFI" and "not drawing any general lessons about PFI", but merely "raising a concern".

"The Prime Minister's expecting Santa to be very generous this year"

Each fortnight The Cartoon Museum at 35 Little Russell Street is featuring a bubble competition as part of the *'Private Eye at 45'* cartoon exhibition.

This issue's winner is **Anne Milchberry** from Toronto.

THIS July, in his role as chair of the Commons environmental audit committee, Tim Yeo wrote in its report, *Reducing Carbon Emissions from Transport,* that it was time for "strict limits" on aviation.

"It is scandalous that governments around the world have failed to grasp the nettle of taxing aviation fuel. It is equally scandalous that no member state within the EU charges VAT on international air tickets… The government has no excuse for not raising Air Passenger Duty…. In view of the imperative to take bold actions in order to help avert dangerous climate change, the government should actively encourage modal shift towards lower carbon modes of transport, and discourage marginal car and plane journeys."

This November, in his role as golf columnist for the *Financial Times*, Yeo wrote of how he had "travelled from Hong Kong to Beijing" to explore how "China's golfing landscape has been literally transformed." Despite some difficulties finding an English-speaking taxi driver at Shanghai airport, and traffic jams in Shenzen, Yeo pronounced himself particularly impressed by the two floodlit golf courses on which he played at Mission Hills, a "vast" new complex of which, he noted, "the environmental lobby disapprove".

All this came a fortnight after he had informed *FT* readers that the Pine Valley course in New Jersey had joined "the Old Course at St Andrews, Augusta National and Muirfield" as "absolute requirements… you must have played by the time the Grim Reaper calls".

LIB DEM MSP Nora Radcliffe has tabled a motion in the Scottish parliament smarmily congratulating and commending the Clydesdale Bank for its alliance with the Post Office "demonstrating the value of this service, especially to people in rural areas where 60 percent of villages have a post office but only 9 percent have a bank branch".

A lot more village communities used to have a bank branch until last year, when the Clydesdale announced the closure of 60 of its expensive-to-run rural branches, including seven in Radcliffe's Gordon constituency in Aberdeenshire, where the local council and villagers have decried the loss of banking facilities at the same time as post office closures in the area.

Good to see the MSP listening to her constituents...

"WE have a systematic attempt to find Tony Blair guilty of the so-called 'loans for peerages' affair – even before the police investigation is over," wrote the world's worst columnist, David Blunkett, last week in his *Sun* column (now appearing way back on page 36, but still raking him in £150,000 a year).

"He has been tried and found guilty of legal jiggery-pokery by sections of the media… I'm biased. I plead guilty to believing the Prime Minister is innocent unless proved otherwise. That's my presumption. But it's also the law. In this country people ARE presumed innocent until found guilty."

Blunkett has obviously been using his spare time since being sacked from the cabinet to brush up on legal matters. As home secretary in November 2003, he greeted the arrest of Sajid Badat by telling reporters that "this individual posed a real threat to life and liberty in our country… It is the belief of the security services this man has connections with the network of al-Qa'ida groups" – remarks which earned him a ticking-off from the Bar Council and an investigation into whether they constituted contempt of court.

By an astonishing coincidence, it was Attorney-General Lord Goldsmith who had the job of clearing his colleague of any wrongdoing.

'Backbiter'

TUNA AVOCADO ROLL 5.99 B
SUSHI - CHEF'S ASS 10.50 B

Whole Foods Market (Washington DC)

FE NEWS

JUST how did Welsh education chiefs manage to overpay £4.6m of public money for work-based training? And what's to be done about the fact that most of it – £3.3m – arose from false claims from training providers?

The Welsh Assembly's audit committee seems unconvinced this is entirely down to an accounting muddle. It thinks education director Steve Marshall and his sidekicks may have swallowed the line about chaos and confusion in the system too easily.

In 2004-2005, £84m was spent on work-based learning schemes in Wales. The overpayment situation arose after ELWa, the now defunct post-16 funding body, introduced a new data contract and payment system. £1.3m of overpayments were put down to problems switching databases, but the rest was down to providers claiming and receiving money they weren't entitled to, such as "failing to report students who had completed or dropped out of training" - errors, say assembly auditors, that "could have been reduced with more fail-safe checks".

Yet Marshall, giving evidence to the committee, dismissed the idea of any fiddle, saying that if the providers concerned were deliberately submitting erroneous data he would have had "no hesitation in calling in the police".

But the audit committee's report this month says that it takes "only limited reassurance from the view of officials that they [the learning providers] were not knowingly doing this" noting that "two-thirds of erroneous payments related to only six providers in the first case of error and 11 in the second."

Meanwhile, the committee concluded, standards of financial control among providers still present unacceptable risks to public funds.

Kingston University is recognized as one of the country's leading modern university's.

Kingston University advertisement

Down on the Fish Farm

FISH farmers Landcatch Limited, which supplies Marks & Spencer, currently markets itself as the UK's number one sustainable fish retailer.

An audit of Landcatch, carried out earlier this year by specialist vet Pete Southgate to ensure the fishery met Marks & Spencer's salmon growing code of practice found an incident of over-dosing permitted limits of formalin in tanks at its site near Gairloch in the West Highlands. Formalin is a solution of 37 percent formaldehyde gas dissolved in water. It is used to control external parasitic infections on farmed fish and is a known carcinogen.

Did Landcatch take the lesson to heart and cut down its use of formalin to that allowed by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)? Apparently not. An internal "guidance note" obtained by the Salmon Farm Protest Group (SFPG) and seen by *Private Eye* tells staff what to do when using too much of the stuff.

"SEPA discharge consents give the maximum number of formalin treatments permitted in any one day and so this is what should be recorded in the triplicate book," it says, before advising that: "If the actual number of [fish] tanks treated exceeds these values, then the surplus treatments should be recorded as taking place on another day."

SEPA told the *Eye* that: "The existence of the document does not in itself constitute an offence under any environmental regulations although if the instructions in the document were acted upon then it is likely that an offence may be committed."

It says it is investigating the document and that if a breach of regulations is found, it will be "dealt with accordingly".

'Old Trout'

"Oooooh, hasn't she got her mother's eyes!"

POSTCARD FROM ULSTER

SOMETIME on the evening of 31 October bombs were planted in four Belfast stores, one in a city centre JJB Sports, the others in a southside suburban retail park off the Boucher road. At around 2am the devices exploded.

The worst affected was a Homebase, which was completely destroyed with the loss of 50 jobs. The store will be rebuilt (at taxpayers' expense as insurers won't cover terrorist damage in Northern Ireland); but this will take anything up to a year. The bill will come to roughly £3m, on top of the £20m or so which a similar attack in August (*Eye* 1164) and others since have cost, according to Peter Hain, the Northern Ireland Secretary.

As it happens, the wrecked Homebase is just yards from a B&Q. On 16 October, an army Ammunition Technical Officer (or bomb disposal man) risked his life for two hours to defuse a device which had been planted in that very same B&Q (as thousands of children attended a funfair nearby).

He saved the store (and B&Q's Christmas trade) but the company – part of the giant, Tory-funding Kingfisher plc – doesn't appear to be particularly grateful, even though five of its outlets have now suffered from bomb attacks over the past year.

The 24 October edition of the *Irish News* carried an explanation from one of several supposed "dissident" groups, the Continuity IRA, for its sudden aversion to B&Q: supposedly it sells "kitchen worktops and flower bedding to the British army" and thus is "a legitimate target" in the war against the occupying forces (and their imperialist rhododendron displays).

Instead of simply ignoring this, B&Q broke with decades of silence from companies facing similar threats and abjectly surrendered. It issued a statement to the paper pleading that: "B&Q does not have contracts with or sell directly to any of the armed forces."

Presumably the managers of Kingfisher will spurn the army's help and defuse any further devices themselves. Except, of course, that by publicly stating that it doesn't do business with the security forces, B&Q will hope to gain immunity from attacks by the CIRA, Real IRA or any other IRA faction, now or in the future.

Unfortunately B&Q's desire for protection – which is likely to be granted by the gleeful terrorosts – puts its competitors in the firing line.

"But mostly I would like to thank God for inspiring me to write songs extolling greed, gang violence, misogyny and the sex trade..."

ITV

Al Jazeera English

WHEN CNN invented the whole 24-hour news channel concept 20 years ago, its opening broadcasts were so inept the heads of the established American networks triumphantly coined the nick-name Chicken Noodle News.

This gag eventually backfired so spectacularly that, two decades later, it was the established all-day reporting outlets – CNN, Sky News, BBC News 24 and Fox News – hoping to be able to sneer at the newcomer to the market, **Al Jazeera English**, the oppressor-tongue spin-off of the established Arabic channel.

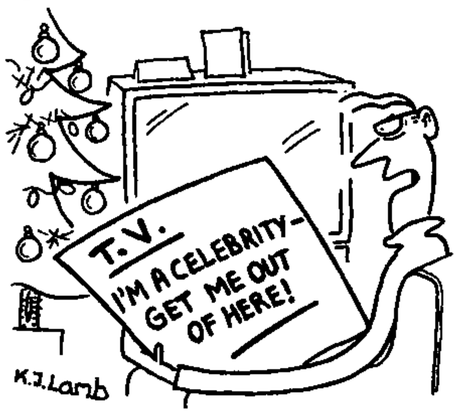
As the channel had been rehearsing for a year, it seemed unlikely that on-screen incompetence would be a target. And so the joke the competitors were floating in advance, their own equivalent of the "chicken noodle news" gag, was referring to the news debutant as "Al Qaeda English", a reference to the parent station's reputation as a home movie channel for Osama bin Laden.

During the first hour or so of AJE's launch day last Wednesday, it looked as if the western jesters might be vindicated. The opening "news headline" was "Palestinian humanitarian crisis in Gaza", a feature on the suffering of a Middle Eastern underdog which cannot possibly be regarded as news. It might have been – and probably was – broadcast at almost any moment during the network's 12 months of trials.

As the bulletin developed, and despite occasional dutiful references to the possibility that a huge tsunami was about to hit Japan, the opening coverage gave the impression of being a structured feature package on the theme of dispossessed people: with reports on those denied land in Liberia and Brazil.

But, just as the new service really did seem to be confirming that it would resemble the Amnesty International newsletter read by one of the 9/11 pilots, trails and news flashes began to stress Israeli angles. An interview with Shimon Peres was upcoming, a frequent "news crawl" across the bottom of the screen reported an Israeli victim of a Palestinian rocket attack.

What felt like a deliberate attempt to include the Jewish position continued during the networks first few days and, whether or not it was simply window-dressing prompted by reports of sales resistance to the



"Jungle Balls, Jungle Balls, Jungle all the way"

network in America, Al Jazeera's critics need to accept that one of their main prejudices was not immediately confirmed.

As for whether AJE really is fulfilling its advertising slogan of "every angle – every side", the picture is more complicated. Although much had been made in advance of the use of four revolving anchor desks – in Doha, Kuala Lumpar, Washington and London – the programmes over the first few days seemed to be pretty much hosted from Doha – in the same way that CNN's default location is Atlanta, and the BBC's London – with intermittent "throws" to the other capitals.

The selection of headlines from the alternative bases also often seems wilfully eccentric. Last Sunday, the "top story in the Americas" was a Seymour Hersh report in the *New Yorker* questioning whether Iran really is developing nuclear weapons. Given the publicity claims made for the network's own pool of dedicated reporters, it's surely a little lame to reflect such a significant news base only through a pick-up from a magazine.

The same questionable emphasis had been evident on the first day when "Europe" was represented only by a story about passport inspection standards. One had imagined that AJE might offer a different spin on stories like the Queen's Speech or *Strictly Come Dancing* but, from the early schedules, it looks as if any story with no specific Arabist perspective will simply be ignored.

This makes you wonder what the audience will be. It's easy to see that there might be a liberal audience in the UK and the US which wishes to see the Middle East reported from a Middle East perspective, but it's less clear why they would want to see their own territories reported from that perspective. In the first week, the London and Washington operations had the feel of an expensive irrelevance to what is essentially an Arab project.

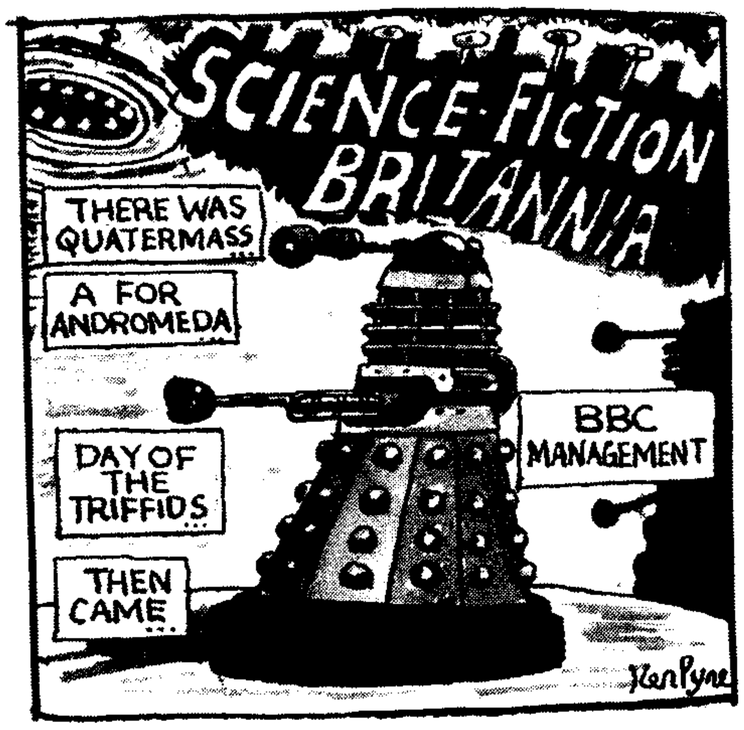
The London bureau's big early coup – "Blair tells Frost Iraq was Disaster" – was a classic Frost moment when the prime minister somehow managed to agree with the premise of a mumbled Frostie question. But this may have been just a bit of luck. Meanwhile, it seems a pity that nothing has been done to rethink the style of 24-hour news. The whole thing looks like a reasonable hoaxer's copy of CNN or Sky, with anchors posed against one city's nightscape asking questions of reporters posed against another. On this early evidence, Al Jazeera English certainly isn't a channel by terrorists for terrorists but, on the other hand, it's not entirely clear who can be expected to tune in on a regular basis.

'Remote Controller'

Latest: Chancellor Gordon Brown has arrived in Iraq to visit British troops

Blair accepts 'disaster' in Iraq

BBC News website



DUMB BRITAIN

Weakest Link, BBC2
Anne Robinson: Bratislava is the capital of which eastern European nation?
Contestant: Er, Alaska?
Robinson: The term "gyppy" that describes a stomach upset is derived from the name of which African country?
Contestant: Venezuela.
Robinson: Juan Peron was twice president of which South American country?
Contestant: Poland.

Virgin Radio
Presenter: OK, let me rephrase that. Against which country did England draw 0-0 in yesterday's England v Macedonia game?
Caller: No, sorry, I still don't know.

MEDIA NEWS

SIR Richard "Beardie" Branson's outraged reaction to the Dirty Digger's gatecrashing of Virgin-NTL's takeover of ITV would be easier to take if his own past record in this sector wasn't so dubious.

Back in the 1980s Beardie was one of the founder-investors in the ill-fated British Satellite Broadcasting, a rival to Murdoch's Sky. But while fellow-shareholders such as Pearson and Granada were trying to outmanoeuvre Sky, Branson was to be found holding secret discussions with Murdoch about whether a head-to-head contest was really necessary. Couldn't some mutually satisfactory "arrangement" be reached to end the battle?

After Murdoch privately informed him that NewsCorp would continue to compete against BSB, Branson (without telling his partners why) suddenly sold his shareholding to the then Australian tycoon Alan Bond. BSB duly collapsed and was amalgamated with Sky, leaving the Dirty Digger laughing all the way to the bank.

Now it's Beardie who is the victim of sharp share-dealing, with Murdoch's blocking holding in ITV leading to a predictable collapse in the company's share price on Monday morning. *Touché*, Beardie!

GOING LIVE

"That looks like Tom Cruise's suitcases arriving at the Castello Bracciano."

– A rather desperate Greg Milam (Sky News) at Bracciano for the Cruise-Holmes wedding.

CONGRATULATIONS to the *Sun*'s TV columnist Sara Nathan, who scooped the world on Monday with the news that Ross Kemp has been named "Digital Channel Personality of the Year" at an obscure showbiz awards ceremony.

No doubt Sara's editor, aka Mrs Ross Kemp, has already dispatched a herogram to the fearless hackette.

TUESDAY 14 November saw, at 7.45am, an historic first for television: every UK news programme – *Sky News, BBC Breakfast* and *GMTV* – was simultaneously running clip packages from *Casino Royale*, interspersed with interviews with its star, Daniel Craig.

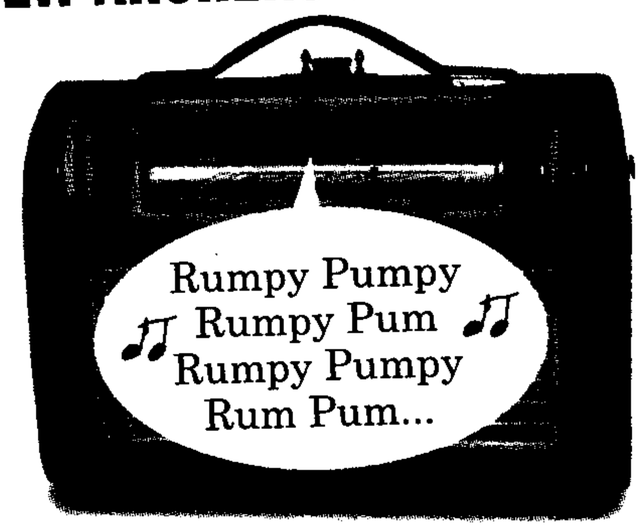
What was the news justification for such gratuitous plugging? The royal premiere of the film was due to take place, er, about 12 hours later. Needless to say, all three channels carried extensive reports on that the following morning.

I-SKY

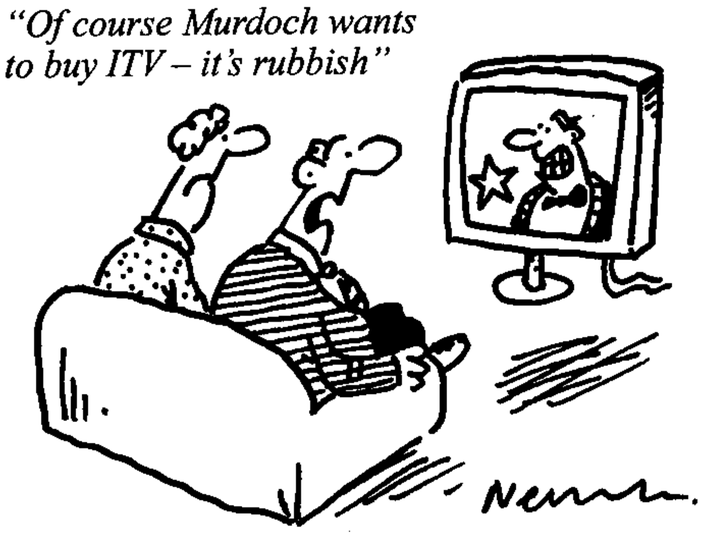
NO missing the fact that a new series of *Lost* is about to start on Sky One (prop: R. Murdoch).

The 17 November edition of *thelondonpaper* (prop: R Murdoch) carried a five-page wraparound faux cover for the new series, not to mention a big colour plug on the TV pages. Readers of that great paper of record the *Sunday Times* (prop: R Murdoch) were then treated to an entire news page dedicated to the "news" that the show was back.

NEW ARCHERS THEME TUNE



"Of course Murdoch wants to buy ITV – it's rubbish"



AD NAUSEAM

JUST as with the ban on tobacco advertising two years ago, advertisers were falling over *themselves to* pre-empt Ofcom's ban on junk food advertising in and around children's programmes and those shows with a high percentage of viewers under 16.

Two days before the ban was announced (on Friday), Burger King suddenly said it would stop advertising during children's programmes. KFC then followed suit, saying that it would stop using toys in its promotions.

Hours before the blade fell, this neatly turned a damaging *fait accompli* in to a PR coup – they care about your kids so much they just decided, entirely altruistically, to stop pushing product their way. Rather than wait for the ban the next day.

This was of course marketing-driven crisis management – Burger King, for example, didn't say that it was going to stop advertising before the watershed, when most children are still watching. But if proof were needed that fast food chains aren't all give, give, give, try turning on your television. Burger King's current campaign, for example, is for its Double Whopper, and uses the slogan "Are you man enough?"

It has garnered eight complaints to the ASA, including one from the Children's Food Campaign, which has suggested that the strapline will make boys who don't guzzle high-fat food feel like sissies. KFC meanwhile has banned the use of trans fats in its cooking oil in the US, but not in the UK. The change in US policy came only after the threat of a law suit. And its latest ad for the Deluxe Boneless Box (only £12.99) features a girl refusing to feed her teddy because she wants the entire box for herself.

JONATHAN GLAZER is one of adland's hottest directors, with the Guinness "Surfer" spot the highlight on his CV. So when he agrees to do a new campaign, it's big news.

Some months ago we learned that Glazer's latest work would be for Motorola's Red phone. This is a part of Bono's Red campaign, where famous multi-millionaires ask us all to give a little towards AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria initiatives.

The ad shows two black bodies emerging from an amorphous lump on a potter's wheel and was dreamt up by adland's hot shop *du jour*, Mother. But this may be the last you hear of it. The trade press reports that Motorola has put the kibosh on the campaign. A Jonathan Glazer spot is not cheap – even if he and Mother were to waive their fees, production and post-production costs would run to six figures. If this turns out to be the case, the Red campaign will have wasted hundreds of thousands of charity money – or the equivalent at least 1,300 of us going out and buying Motorola Red phones – on what we must presume are creative differences.

"WE KNOW what it takes to be a Tiger. Outstanding strategic instincts driven by unrelenting executional diligence".

So drivels the latest advert from consultants Accenture beneath a photo of Tiger Woods and the line "stick-to-itiveness 90% – intuitiveness 10%".

Could this be the same "stick-to-itiveness" that the firm showed on its 10-year contract for the NHS's national IT programme – from which, after losing a couple of hundred million pounds, it recently walked away after just two years?

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

IF EVER there was an example of how *not* to handle the breaking of bad news, it was the unimpressive wriggling of Radio 3's accident-prone Controller, Roger Wright, as he tried to explain how the station's latest bit of dumbing-down was nothing of the sort.

In a performance destined for the David Blunkett Bumper Book of PR Triumphs, Wright managed to reduce the entirety of Radio 3 into chaos, confusion and revolt, prompting a tidal wave of indignant email from listeners who now know that when Wright protests about not driving Radio 3 along the route of Classic FM, he means the opposite.

The latest crisis, described by one BBC insider as "the greatest calamity Radio 3 has ever faced", emerged from a recent staff meeting and full details won't be officially announced until December. But it's clear Wright plans to axe many regular programmes, together with most of its live concert broadcasts – except for the Proms, which he dare not touch.

Some of the programmes will be no loss. *Voices, Stage and Screen* and *Three for All* were tired formats destined for the scrap-heap. But live concert relays, giving radio audiences the chance to hear music as it happens and (so the jargon goes) from "the best seat in the house", has been central to Radio 3 from its inception.

According to Wright, he's been misunderstood. Live broadcasts *will* continue, it's just "live as live" that will be scrapped – an arcane comment which apparently means that concerts will still be recorded for broadcast on some later date: packaged, edited and trimmed down to fit the schedules more neatly.

To many, this may not sound like live broadcasting at all. Which of course it isn't: it's pre-recording. And the difference – apart from the loss of excitement and immediacy in hearing something as it happens – is money. Live recording requires 15 people onsite to do the job. Pre-recording requires three. What's more, edited-down pre-recordings suit Wright's apparently Procrustean plans to reduce Radio 3's output to rigid, unchanging fixtures, topped-and-tailed by "celebrity" DJ's in the manner of, er, Classic FM.

Wright says most Radio 3 listeners can't tell the difference between live and non-live broadcasts – an extraordinarily patronising remark to make of some of the keenest ears in the country, and comparable to the gaffe a few weeks ago when the BBC reduced the sound quality of Radio 3 broadcasts and thought no one would notice. They did; and the Beeb was forced to climb down.

The Friends of Radio 3 pressure group, which Wright persistently tries to ignore, make the point that the BBC would never replace live sports broadcasts with recorded and edited highlights on the grounds that it wouldn't matter to anyone: so why does it presume to do so with classical music?

Cost-cutting aside, one answer is that Wright is desperate for Classic FM's audience. For two years running, his own listening figures for the pre-Proms quarter have dropped to "worst ever" levels: a clear indictment of his policies, you might think. And yet he continues to drive his core, committed audience away while trying to chase the casual listener.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

HUMBUG OF THE WEEK

NEWS that Kate Moss is to feature in an exhibition of fashion shots at the National Portrait Gallery gave the *Telegraph* the perfect excuse to tut-tut and dust off its pictures of the model.

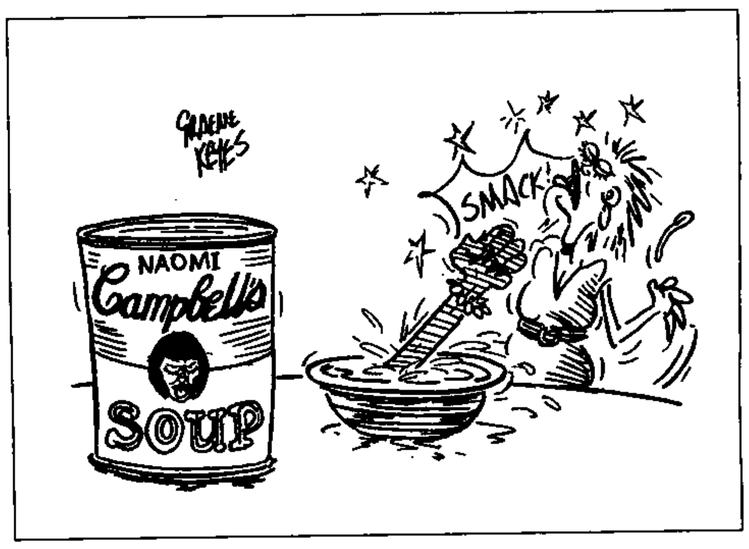
The show, according to the *Telegraph*, is "an attempt to tap into the 'yoof' market" – which is a bit rich coming from the paper that has slavishly reported Moss smoking a cigarette in public (September); Moss snogging a woman at a charity auction (May); Moss rebuilding her career (April), etc, etc.

IN THE THEATRE

WHY has the *Guardian* not yet managed to review the new play by gay controversialist Mark Ravenhill?

Entitled *pool (no water)*, it is on at the Lyric, Hammersmith, which has recently been taken over by leftish artistic director David Farr and would normally by right up the *Grauniad*'s street. Indeed, any play opening at the Lyric is normally reviewed within a day or two by the *Graun*. So why not the new Ravenhill? Every other Fleet Street newspaper which is serious about theatre has done so – and almost every single critic so far has savaged it.

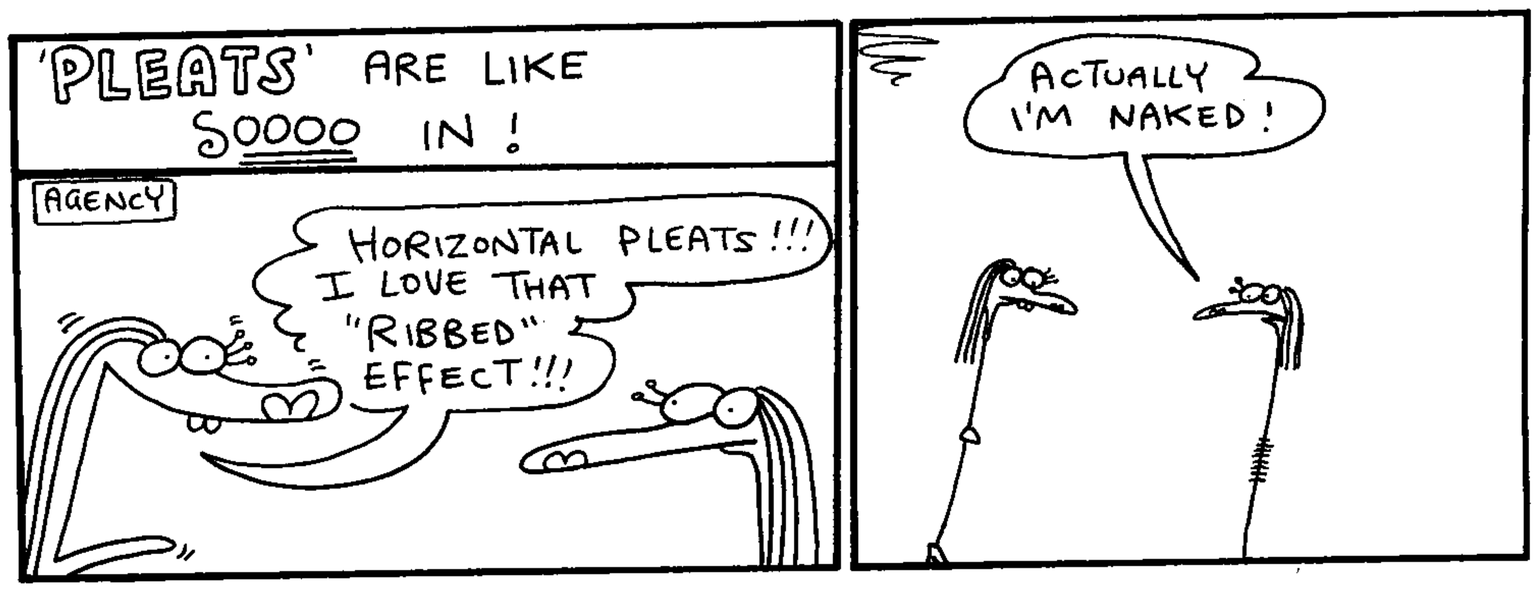
It so happens that Ravenhill is an occasional contributor to the *Grauniad*. Is it possible the paper has decided not to run a review because it did not want to upset the playwright with yet another mauling?



Sioux Chief Required
Clarke's Restaurant, Bath

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



Down on the Farm

ONE of the perennial mysteries of British farming was again highlighted when Defra recently published its figures for the last ever payout of EU subsidies to UK farmers under the old system (before, that is, the arrival of the wonderful new "single farm payment", under which, thanks to the sublime incompetence of its Rural Payments Agency, Defra does its best to ensure that farmers receive no payments at all).

Top of the list for "farm payments", receiving subsidies for 2004/5 of £2,358,947.01, was Farmcare, the farming operation owned by the Co-Op and Britain's biggest owner of dairy cows. The rest of the top 20 payments went, as might be expected, not to individual farmers but to large agri-business corporations and farm management companies.

These sums were dwarfed, however, by what are called "non-farm payments". Topping the charts here were Tate and Lyle Europe, receiving a massive £88,703,757, because of the largesse showered on them under the EU's old "sugar regime". Although this was devised primarily to help French sugar-beet growers, Tate and Lyle, as Britain's largest sugar producer, has also long done very nicely out of it. The purpose of this scheme was to give Europe's beet growers enough subsidy to enable them to out-compete Third World sugar cane producers, the bill of course being picked up by European consumers who had to pay twice the world price for sugar to sweeten their tea.

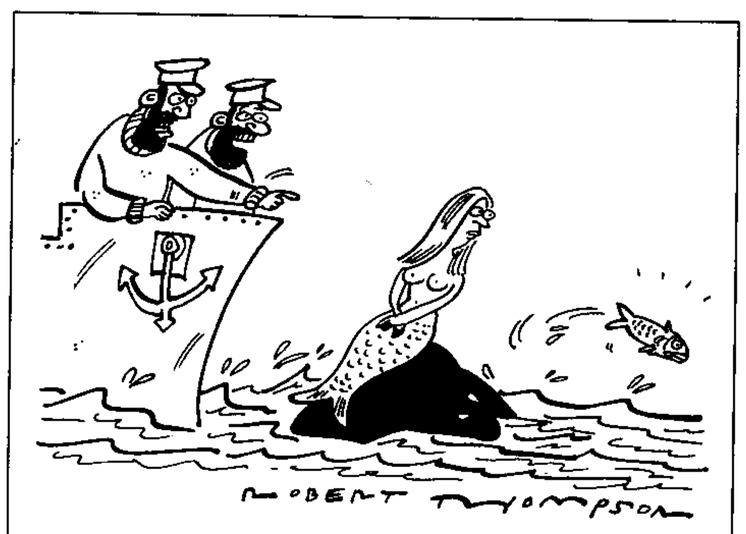
Second place in the "non-farm payment" charts was also occupied by a sugar company, with third place going again to Tate and Lyle Europe (another £20m) and fifth place to Tate and Lyle Citric Acid (obviously no relation). But then came the surprising fact that most of the remaining top 20 "non-farm" recipients were dairy companies, such as Nestlé UK, Lakeland Dairies and Express Dairies.

What might have seemed surprising about this was that Britain's dairy industry is one of the more obvious disaster areas of the entire UK economy, thanks to the fact that our fast-dwindling number of dairy farmers are only able to sell their milk to supermarkets and processors for less than it costs them to produce the stuff in the first place. The farmgate price paid by, say Tesco, is just over 17p a litre, as opposed to a production cost of 21p. The supermarket then sells it on to its customers at anything up to 60p.

So the big firms which buy and process the milk are doing very well out of it (one, Robert Wiseman Dairies, recently reported a 41 percent profit increase). But the individual dairy farmers, no matter how efficiently they produce their milk, are doing so badly that their numbers since 1997 have collapsed from 35,000 to below 20,000. Indeed, so catastrophic have the economics of the dairy industry become that the firm which topped that "farm payments" list, the Co-Op's Farmcare, has just announced that it is selling all its cows and getting out of milk production altogether.

The mystery, however, is why the supermarkets exercise such a stranglehold over the farmers that they can force them to sell their milk for less than its production cost, then sell it on for more than three times the price. Is the explanation that they can buy their milk from other countries, such as France, at prices which mean that they couldn't care less if the entire UK dairy industry went out of business? Because, the way things are going, that is what is looking increasingly likely.

'Muckspreader'



"Good Lord! Look... a cod!"

PRISONS IT SYSTEM

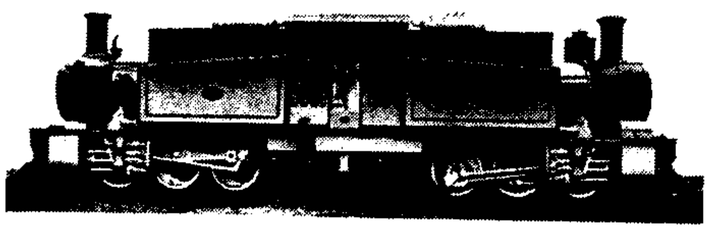
BACK in September it was revealed that the pilot of the government's National Offender Management Service's much-vaunted IT system, C-NOMIS, trailed as a vital improvement to the criminal justice system, had been delayed by seven weeks or more (*Eye* 1166). Now it turns out that seven weeks is Home Office-speak for "at least three months" – and even that isn't the truth.

C-NOMIS is in fact five or even six months behind schedule, depending on what start date you believe. Back in June Mike Manisty, director of the NOMS information services department, told a London criminal justice conference he hoped to start the trial system at HMP Albany on the Isle of Wight in July. Then in October John Powls, programme director for C-NOMIS, told a seminar that Whitehall hopes to launch the system at Albany at the beginning of December.

Whenever the pilot eventually starts, it will not be a proper test. When it begins it will only be running the prisons side of the system, not the probation element. Probation workers say this will mean double entry of data and potential problems with melding the systems together later – exactly the kind of problem C-NOMIS was conceived of to solve. The first "live" systems will not be started until April or May next year, with a projected completion at the end of 2008.

Any further delays can only push C-NOMIS further back. In August the Home Office blamed an inability to get C-NOMIS to interface with the Inmate Information System, the central database into which the current Prison Service database feeds information. Mr Powls said the problem is the difficulty IT contractor EDS (who else!) is having upgrading the Offender Management National Infrastructure (OMNI).

During the latest trials, Home Office ministers asked if C-NOMIS could provide live data on exactly how many prisoners were actually in prison at any one time. The short answer was, er, "No".



SIGNAL FAILURES

Changing pains

HERE's an example of why civil servants shouldn't control a railway: they think changing trains is convenient.

Cross-country trains suffered traumatic upheaval in 2002 with Virgin's botched shake-up. Cuts to improve the timetable included robbing Liverpool and other important places of Cross-country services (*Eyes passim*). Now the dust has settled, the Department for Transport (DfT) intends to mess up the services again in the new Cross-country franchise.

To improve performance statistics without spending on better infrastructure, the DfT wants to simplify operations in Birmingham by halving the direct journeys available on Cross-country. Official consultees condemned the proposals because many passengers would have to change trains once or twice where now they use only one train.

The DfT has responded to the overwhelming message of the "consultation" by ignoring it and issuing the flawed service specification to franchise bidders. The DfT does offer some piffle about changing trains being a pleasure in the new regime, eg: "Bidders are required to demonstrate in their bids how they intend to expand upon traditional customer service practices to ensure that the need to change trains does not become an inconvenience." Yeah, right.

Mandarins cocooned in Whitehall, who now have unprecedented control of the rail network, have no idea of the value of direct trains (even those available just once or twice a day) to elderly people, teenagers making their first unescorted long-distance journeys, holidaymakers with heavy luggage, families with infants and buggies, and infrequent travellers who find railways confusing and esoteric. They have no idea that changing trains deters people with mobility or visual impairments, especially those in wheelchairs who have to pre-book help to board and alight. They have no idea of the stress of being on a delayed train and worrying about a connecting service, or of the frustration of waiting an hour or more after a connection has been missed. And missed connections are more common than under British Rail because franchisees are fined for delays – even if trains are delayed to honour advertised connections.

At a conference this month, rail minister Tom Harris drew gasps of disbelief when he proclaimed fewer Cross-country passengers would change in future at Birmingham New Street (which already shuts whenever overcrowding threatens safety). The DfT reckons they'll change instead at places like Wolverhampton, Banbury or Derby. But Birmingham will be the only connecting point for many journeys. Seasoned passengers will often decide they're more likely to find seats and luggage space in the train at Birmingham than if they change at a smaller station. There are also more alternatives from Birmingham when a train is delayed or cancelled, and the smaller stations don't exactly have ideal facilities for those long waits after missed connections.

THE Cross-country "consultation" lacked a vital ingredient – statistics on where passengers travel. The DfT says it can't "make current passenger flow data publicly available as it is owned by the train operators"; publishing the data would "undermine the commercial position of operators".

Yeah, right again. Virgin Cross-country has swallowed vast amounts of subsidy under a "management contract" where taxpayers cover the losses and pay Virgin an annual fee. What's "commercial" about this arrangement, and how come Virgin owns the data when it's a mere government contractor?

BRITAIN's customer-focused rail industry is telling passengers they're not permitted to travel by train between certain stations, because the tickets required are too complicated.

One *Eye* reader was baffled when National Rail Enquiries Online could find no train times from Sevenoaks to Blackheath. An NREO official explained: "The journey between Sevenoaks and Blackheath is not a permitted route because it involves a 'double back' at New Cross which is not allowed by the fares check."

Other searches of NREO's database reveal that residents of Blackheath and other places along the line to Barnehurst aren't permitted to travel by train to a swathe of Kent including Tunbridge Wells, Hastings and Ashford. It's not a case of one train operator not accepting another's tickets; all of these journeys are entirely in the territory of South Eastern Trains.

'Dr B Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

A HANDBAG?

ONE of the loose ends of the Shirley Porter "Homes for Votes" affair was the dame's declaration, under oath in January 2002, that her assets amounted to no more than £300,000. She was in no position, therefore, to repay the £43m the House of Lords, the previous month, had ruled she owed Westminster taxpayers in recompense for her gerrymandering activities in the 1980s.

In fact she and her husband Leslie had been estimated to be jointly worth around £69m. And in 2004 she eventually agreed to repay Westminster council £12.3m. Clearly the £300,000 claim was a lie. Yet no action has ever been taken against the *mendacious dame*. Not even after she bought a flat off Park Lane for £1.5m which, presumably, she found in an old handbag.

Paul Dimoldenberg, leader of Westminster's Labour group, whose disclosure of "confidential" documents to the *Today* programme led investigators to Shirley's missing millions, wants Inspector Knacker to investigate whether Porter committed a crime when she lied under oath. First Westminster would have to hand over files on the case to the Yard. And that, Westminster's "director of legal and administrative services" Colin Wilson, writes to Dimoldenberg, it will not do. "It is not possible for me to give you a general consent to release confidential information to the Metropolitan Police... the city council is subject to restrictions on disclosure... as a result of the terms of the settlement agreement," he said.

As Dame Shirley sips her orange juice in the Israeli sunshine, she must reflect how good it is, in her declining years, to still have friends!

● YET another BNP councillor looks about to bite the dust. Richard Mulhall, who sits on Calderdale council, was found guilty earlier this month of four counts of benefit fraud, totalling £3,000. After the *Halifax Courier* reported Mulhall's conviction under the fair and reasonable headline "BNP leader is a lying cheat", thugs attacked Asian newsagents who had the paper on sale. Mulhall will be sentenced on 14 December. In the meantime he is nobly refusing to resign.

WRAGGE HEAD

ACCOUNTANTS Grant Thornton have been interviewing councillors and officers in Doncaster, gathering evidence in the "misconduct" case against managing director Susan Law (*Eye* 1169).

Ms Law's real offence was to call in police to investigate allegations of corruption surrounding Mayor Martin Winter's pet regeneration project, the Glass Park – but her accusers are concentrating on more heinous crimes, such as "the cancellation of the civic ball" and an allegation that Law could not always be relied on to say "Hello" in the corridor.

The council is receiving legal advice from solicitor Mark Greenburgh of Wragge and Co. In 2003 he advised Lincolnshire's Tory leader Ian Croft on how to get rid of chief executive David Bowles as revenge for Bowles blowing the whistle on Croft's corrupt predecessor Jim Speechley (*Eyes passim*). Greenburgh's advice ended up costing the taxpayer more than £580,000, including a £400,000 payoff for Bowles and Wragge's bill for £168,000. Oh, and Croft had to resign in disgrace. There may be a lesson there for Mayor Winter, but we're darned if we can see it!

CALL ME AL

THE Labour party is asking councillors around Britain to dig into their pockets to help ease its financial crisis. The party is already £27m in the red. Things can only get worse with declining membership, fewer donations and the prospect of having to repay millions in "loans" following the cash-for-honours affair.

Councillors are encouraged to make donations to party funds – in some cases a percentage of their allowances. If every councillor donated, say, 5 percent of an average allowance of £7,000, it would raise more than £2m a year for the party.

It's all meant to be voluntary. But at least one Labour councillor has found himself in trouble for refusing to pay. Sunderland city councillor Bryn Sidaway has been summoned to appear before a special meeting of the city's Labour group to explain why he is unwilling to cough up a "voluntary" 3 percent of his £6,000-a-year allowance.

Sidaway feels it's voluntary in the same way that paying protection money to Al Capone was voluntary. He tells the *Eye*: "It is a matter of principle. They cannot tell me what to do with my allowance. In fact I contribute far more than is being demanded to Labour party funds every year. But I am worried that this levy is unlawful: in effect they are skimming off public money for party political purposes. It's contrary to the local government code of conduct and Labour party rules."

Rules? As the *Eye* went to press Sidaway was expecting to be expelled from the party for the crime of trying to abide by them.

● ONE Labour councillor in a position to make a handsome donation to party funds is Haringey's Dhiren Basu, "executive member for organisational development and performance". With his colleagues, he is celebrating a 18.5 percent rise in allowances. When "special responsibility" allowances are taken into account, Cllr Basu grosses £32,500 a year for sitting on the council. In 2003, as chair of the council's e-government committee, Basu was the man behind the council's "TechRefresh" IT project which was meant to update all Haringey's computer systems for £9m. The bill to date is £24.6m. Some performance!

LATEST SUPERHERO
HAVE NO FEAR!! I WILL DEFEND DEMOCRACY BY OBSERVING COMPLAINTS AND DELIVERING A CONSIDERED JUDGMENT IN DUE COURSE...
RSJ

"Thank God! It's Ombudsman!"

ROCK AND ROWELL

ISLE OF WIGHT council is about to spend £13m shoring up a road along the island's unstable southern coastline (*Eye* 1170). The costly and controversial work is to be undertaken by civil engineers High-Point Rendel (H-PR) under the supervision of the council's "strategic director, economic development and regeneration", Derek Rowell.

On 8 November the island's policy commission met to consider a report by outside scrutineers GQ Group (GQG). This was dated 8 July 2005, but had hitherto remained in the domain of senior officials only. GQG found that: "No contract was created between the council and High-Point Rendel for the consultancy work carried out on the Undercliff Drive scheme. Value £894,260... There was significant evidence of non-compliant procurement processes within the council. These included non-compliance to contract standing orders and EC procurement rules. Examples include the use of uncompetitive processes for the appointment of consultant engineers, absence of formal contracts and the initiation of works before contract issue."

Compare that with this: "The supervision element of the work carried out by H-PR valued at £1.2m was not advertised in the Official Journal of the European Commission, failed to meet EC procurement requirements and did not follow the council's internal regulations. It was therefore awarded unfairly and illegally."

The latter is from the Audit Commission's damning December 2004 report on H-PR's involvement with Scarborough borough council's hideously over-budget Castle Headland sea defence scheme (*Eyes passim*). Director of technical services at the time in Scarborough, as Eye readers know, was Derek Rowell.

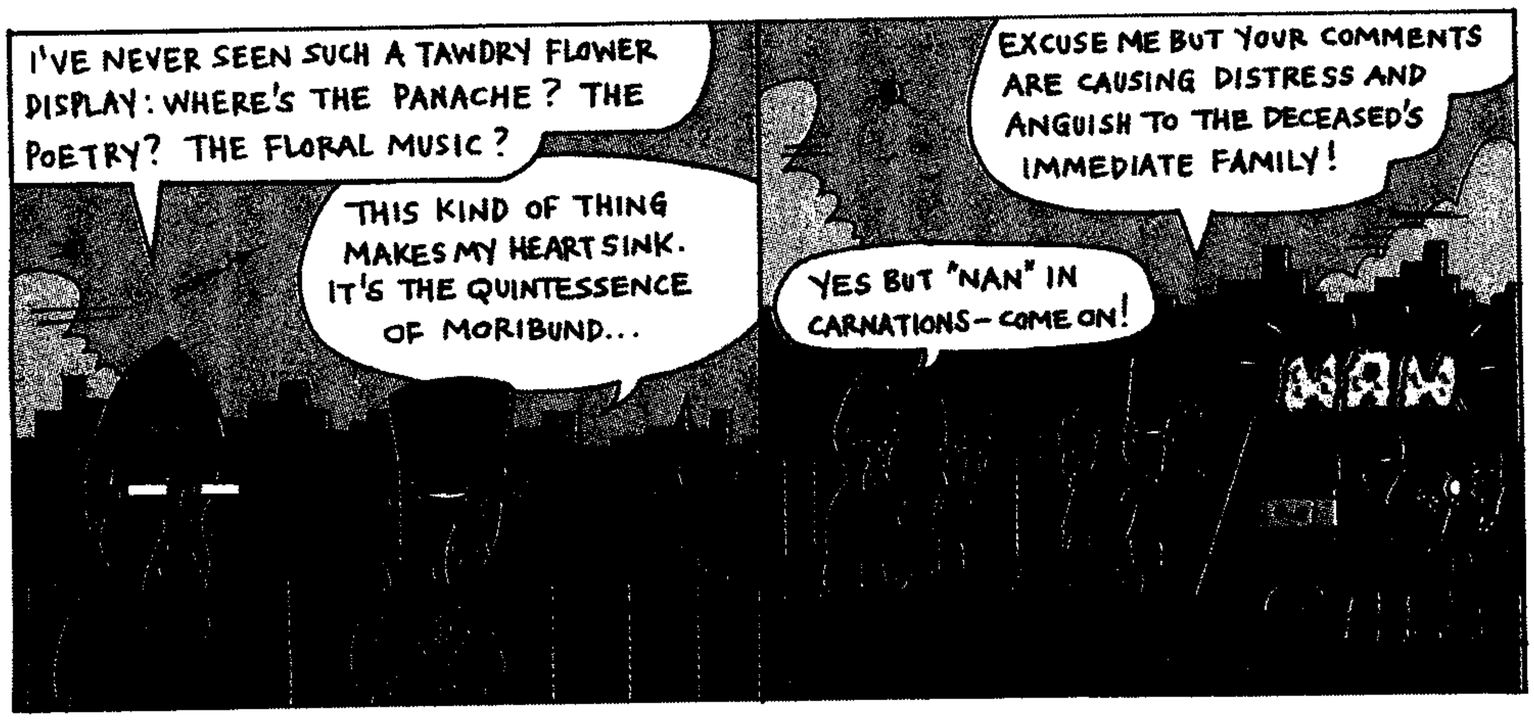
One island resident following events with interest is Mr Alan Clark, who lives in the village of Whitwell. He is a retired director of H-PR, and had responsibility for work at both the Isle of Wight and Scarborough over the years.

Curious fact: the only serious alternative to shoring up the crumbling Undercliff Drive at great expense would be to upgrade the rural road through... Whitwell.

● BAD NEWS for water diviners. In July *Eye* 1163 told how the States (Parliament) of Jersey had postponed enacting water conservation measures because a water diviner had claimed the island had unlimited supplies of underground fresh water, flowing beneath the sea from France. The States commissioned geologists to dig boreholes at two locations specified by the diviner to test the claims, at a cost of £70,000. Now the results are in and – surprise, surprise – there are no underground streams. The small amount of water extracted was chemically tested and found to be identical with other sources on Jersey – ie it had fallen as rainwater on the island and was not mystically transported there from France, Narnia, or anywhere else. Just fancy that.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH A TAWDRY FLOWER DISPLAY: WHERE'S THE PANACHE? THE POETRY? THE FLORAL MUSIC?
THIS KIND OF THING MAKES MY HEART SINK. IT'S THE QUINTESSENCE OF MORIBUND...
EXCUSE ME BUT YOUR COMMENTS ARE CAUSING DISTRESS AND ANGUISH TO THE DECEASED'S IMMEDIATE FAMILY!
YES BUT "NAN" IN CARNATIONS – COME ON!
NAN

NOOKS and CORNERS

"LEAD us, heavenly Father, lead us / O'er the world's tempestuous sea..." James Edmeston, with whom Sir Gilbert Scott trained, was rather better as a hymn-writer than an architect.

His masterpiece, St Paul's, Onslow Square, near South Kensington Station, was, with its galleries, rather old-fashioned for its date (1859-60) but is nevertheless a decent enough building and is the dominant feature in the handsome development of houses built by Sir Charles Freake – now, rightly, a conservation area.

St Paul's was built as a "Low" church (Freake also built one for "High" services) and in recent years it has been run by Holy Trinity Brompton which likes to "plant" congregations in other churches to propagate its own type of religion. It was at "HTB" that the Alpha evangelical programme was founded.

At present St Paul's is closed as a parish church, but HTB has a plan to reopen it as a "new 'post-Alpha' theological college": that is, as a sort of Christian conference centre. Alpha International, a charity "closely linked" to HTB, is to lease the church and its associated buildings to implement this £6m project.

This might all seem fine – churches must often be adapted to survive – until it is appreciated what HTB proposes to do. In what is mendaciously called a "restoration", the church is to be gutted, its galleries and organ removed and a new steel structure inserted. And there is more: the adjacent church hall – a decent and serviceable later Victorian building – is to be demolished, along with the 1960s vicarage which faces Onslow Square. Both are to be replaced by an exciting new building with a curved glazed façade.

HTB has told locals the development will be a low-key community facility, and that if it doesn't get permission it won't spend the money and will merely reopen St Paul's as a church (surely a good thing?) But to the diocese it stresses that leasing the site to Alpha International will relieve the Church of a redundant building, and the Bishop of London is delighted that it is "likely to make the area more vibrant". But locals do not want Onslow Square to be more "vibrant" and the scheme is opposed by the Brompton Association, among others.

Now here HTB has been clever, for not only has it revised the scheme but it has hired Foster & Partners as architects to ensure it is approved. Not that Milord Foster will be "restoring" St Paul's Church himself: oh no – that would cost even more. It has recently emerged that the egregious superstar asks an additional fee for any scheme to be branded with his personal name. Otherwise you just get the firm – an anonymous international design machine whose creations have made the Foster brand an insidious expression of global capitalism.

But hiring the Foster name is clearly useful; for the firm has also been wheeled in to save the trustees of the Commonwealth Institute from the embarrassing consequences of their recent decisions. As the nefarious hybrid bill proposed by the ridiculous Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Sport 'n' Stuff, to "de-list" this remarkable and useful 1960s structure (*Eye* 1160) meets considerable opposition, the trustees have decided to seek planning permission and listed building consent in the normal way for a scheme by Foster & Partners for developing the site which retains the institute's main hall. We shall see.

ANOTHER unfortunate consequence of the fawning, uncritical adulation given to every doodle by Foster is that Westminster City Council wants to spend £25m of central government money (ie our money) to "improve the streetscape in the Whitehall area".

This is based on the 1998 World Squares for All masterplan prepared by the Foster firm, and may well have a sinister import as this "redesign" of Whitehall "provides a good opportunity to integrate security precautions for the future, in the light of events over recent years". I suppose this means helping the police control – and prevent – demonstrations. But what seems gratuitous, and thoroughly objectionable, is that the Cenotaph will be isolated on a pedestrian area lined with "elegant bollards" and flanked by new balustrades.

If any structure in Whitehall deserves total respect it is surely the Cenotaph. Originally a temporary structure designed by Lutyens, so perfectly did it express the grief of the nation after the Great War that it was permanently reerected in Portland stone. Its austere, poignant beauty is enhanced by the fact that it stands isolated in the middle of the road. "The project," insists Westminster, "has been carefully designed to remove existing street clutter, as well as set new and essential street furniture, such as attractive street lights, trees and any security measures, in a much more spacious and better integrated layout".

It seems a pity the clutter to be cleared does not include the Women of World War II Memorial, that naïve and unnecessary monument further along Whitehall which dares challenge the supremacy of the Cenotaph and for which Westminster City Council granted planning permission (Eyes 1115 and 1149). New bollards and paving is much worse, however. When bollards are required by the Cenotaph, around Armistice Day, the truly elegant and interesting bollards and railings especially designed by Lutyens are temporarily erected. Otherwise Whitehall needs no new street furniture. Leave the Cenotaph alone.

'Piloti'

Letters

Just cause

Sir,

Thank you for your letter dated 9 November 2006 and copy of the latest edition of Private Eye, regarding my complaint against your aforesaid magazine. When I wrote to you on the 24 October 2006 it was to seek an apology not to have my letter published.

*Not only did I not receive an apology but I must point out to you that the version of my letter that you published was inaccurate. In the third paragraph you have printed my letter as saying, "MPs of course do not work in the House of Commons", when as you can see from the enclosed copy of my original letter I clearly wrote, "MPs of course do not **just** work in the House". There is a vast difference in the meaning of these two sentences and given your tendency for satire and mischief I cannot rule out that this was not done deliberately.*

Given this inaccurate and misleading printing of my letter I hope you will feel able to reconsider and apologise, otherwise I will have no alternative but to take up this matter with the Press Complaints Commission.

Yours sincerely,
PIARA S. KHABRA MP,
House of Commons.

Lookalike

Daniel Craig

Geoffrey Hoon

Sir,

I was watching the latest BBC TV Question Time when I suddenly froze with incredulity. I noted the amazing similarity between Geoffrey Hoon and the latest James Bond incarnation – actor Daniel Craig. Check it out.

ALASTAIR ROBERTSON,
Pitlochry.

SOLUTIONS

"Dunn-Line Passenger Transport Solutions" – *coaches*

"Internet Dreams: Inspirational Media Solutions" – *websites*

"Platts Strategic Media Solutions" – *adverts*

"Vehicle Control Solutions Ltd: an effective means of deterring unauthorised parking" – *wheelclamps*

"Zoom Airlines: Onboard Sales Solutions" – *duty-free*

"Broadview Blinds: Domestic and Commercial Shading Solutions" – *blinds*

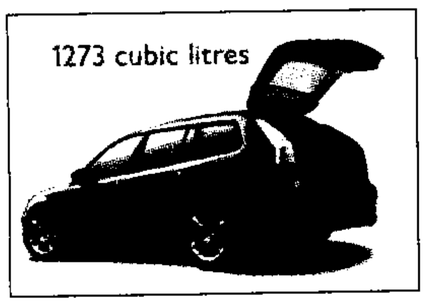
All submitted by readers

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Apparently they were hung in the spare bedroom, hidden behind the door.
2 RARE OLD MASTERS FOUND IN OXFORD HOUSE.
STUDIES OF SAINTS BY FRA ANGELICO.
"THE MOST EXCITING FIND FOR A CENTURY."
Which is exactly where I'd have put them.
And me–what's all the fuss about?
2 RARE OLD

Silly old boot?



Sir,

I found this amusing (from the Saab ad you have printed several times). Maybe it's too technical for your "silly cuttings" category. But for an ad for a company that claims to be technically competent, it's pretty stupid. Perhaps (for the arts graduate?) it might help to say that it's equivalent to expressing the boot volume as "2230 cubic pints".

Best wishes,
GRAHAM KINGSLEY,

Baldock, Herts.

Grocer guilty?

Sir,

In your thoughtful review (1171, p9) of Hutton's latest piece about his whitewash you remind us that the original "inquiry" did not investigate the death of Dr Kelly. It did not even mention the obvious suspect, Edward (the Grocer) Heath.

During his disastrous premiership (1970-1974) the Grocer made two changes which killed Kelly 30 years later. First he made government scientists subservient to the pen-pushing classicists in Whitehall. It was this change which allowed Jack Straw to describe Kelly as a "fairly junior official". Kelly is said to have laughed at this and, indeed, there is something faintly ridiculous about a distinguished scientist with an international reputation being so characterised by a student rabble-rouser who has never had a proper job. But was Kelly's amusement wholehearted I wonder? According to Hamlet, "the insolence of office" is one of the strongest arguments for suicide along with the pangs of unrequited love and the law's delays.

The Grocer also changed the basis of civil servants' widows' pensions. Pre-Grocer a civil servant could opt to buy his widow a pension. Therefore, if he lost his own pension by misconduct leading to dismissal, or sacrificed it by resigning on a point of principle, his widow would still be provided for. But the Grocer made the widow contribution obligatory for men and amalgamated it with the pension of the civil servant himself. The effect was that when Kelly was suspected of telling the truth, he knew that if he was sacked for this offence and subsequently died his widow would be destitute, but if he died before he was sacked she would receive the pension he had paid for. So he did.

Yours faithfully,
PHILIP ROE,

St Albans, Herts.

"The screws spit in your heroin"

Train spotter

Sir,

If Dr B Ching believes that Southeastern trains does not pad out its timetables, perhaps he can explain the following. From the new December timetable my daily train (the 06:12 from Sevenoaks to Charing Cross) will no longer stop at Orpington, and yet will take a minute longer, arriving at Charing Cross at 06:48.

It will also take seven minutes to complete the 1.1 miles from London Bridge to Waterloo East and four minutes to stagger the remaining 0.6 miles into Charing Cross. And this is using the latest electric trains.

The old underpowered "Hastings diesels" could complete exactly the same journey and stopping pattern in 1970 in 33 minutes. So much for progress.

Regards,
BILL MARTIN,

Via email.

Lookalike

Hogarth lady

Ms Spears

Sir,

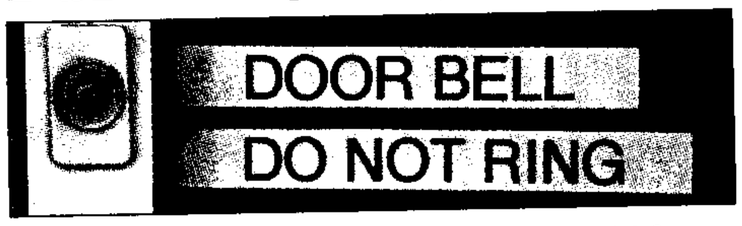
Just imagine my amazement, having just returned to the UK, on discovering an uncanny likeness which may interest your readers.

Are Ms Spears and the lady in the Metro photograph related? Should we be told?

JOHN HODGE,

London W13.

I-SPY *Tooting Broadway, London*



Submitted by Aubrey Botsford. £10 paid for similar submissions.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He [Diawara] brings out an extra six to twelve inches and it's a fantastic tackle."
SCOTT MINTO, BBC
(Nick Hannam)

"He chanced his arm and it came off..."
BRIAN MOORE, BBC
(Colin Cameron)

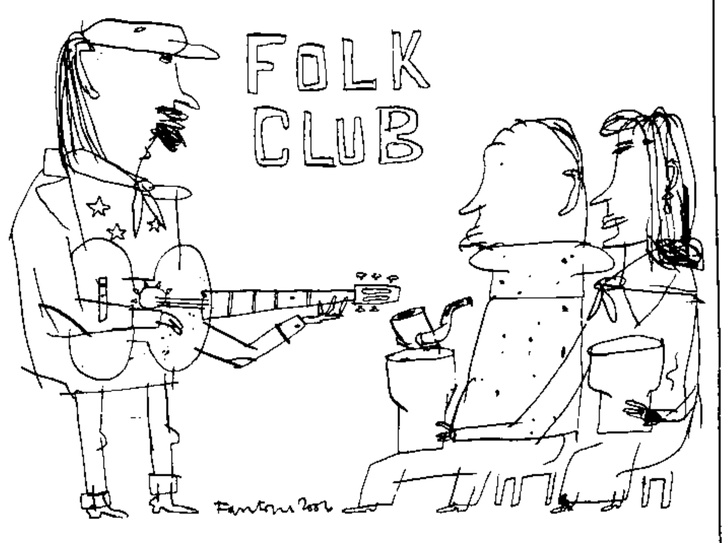
"He reached out with one of his two large left hands."
Commentator, Radio 5 Live
(Ian Metcalfe)

"The scoreline didn't reflect the result..."
MARCUS BUCKLAND, Sky
(Carol Whinnom & Neil Woodcock)

"We can't live in the past – we can only live in the future."
GLEN ROEDER
(David Lea)

● COLEMANBALLS 13 – ON SALE NOW ●

Scenes You Seldom See



"And now, a song that celebrates the virtues of American globalisation"

Notes & Queries

Sir,

Arkwright & Son may well have installed their staircase in 1902 to mark King Edward VII's Durbar ("Duchess Of Love", Eye 1171).

However, in order to prevent misleading your readers, I feel compelled to point out that His Royal Highness did not in fact attend this ceremony until the following year, in Delhi, in 1903.

Oh, and by the way, Edward VII was Prince Charles's great-great-grandfather, and not his great-grandfather as stated.

If you would be so kind as to print my letter, I shall promise to try to get out more.

Yours sincerely,
BRIAN LEEDHAM,

West Ewell, Surrey.

Sir,

On behalf of R2DT, who is currently interviewing for the job as editor in chief, I would like to point out that he is an astromech droid and does not enjoy being confused with a humanoid protocol droid and would like an apology for the use of his picture to illustrate the current changes at the Daily Telegraph.

CHEWBACCA (managing director),

Via email.

Sir,

May I be the first to point out that while your cartoon is correct in suggesting that Caravaggio made use of Chiaroscuro in his work, it may have been more appropriate to refer to the technique known as Tenebrism (murkiness) which he popularised.

RICHARD CLARKE,

Via email.

Sir,

Page 23 of your issue 1171 carries a playlist for "Classic Radio Three FM". This spoof is making a valid point about dumbing down but it may need to consider its own dumbness: Rodriguez Guitar Concerto lacks the apostrophe after the name of the composer. If this had been included I would only have been able to carp about the one error, ie, that it should have been Rodrigo's Guitar Concerto.

RAY BLACK,

Harrogate.

Sir,

Frankly, I don't feel at all sorry for the Isles of Scilly Council (Rotten Boroughs, Eye 1171). If they haven't the nous to report births on their roads to the Audit Commission, thereby achieving a negative score with regards to deaths on the same, and can't adopt even one black African potential fireman, then they are not living in the same world that the rest of us are ruining.

Yours faithfully,
PHILIP DUNN,

Ditchling, Hassocks, W. Sussex.

Letter from **Abidjan**

from Our Own Correspondent

DIVIDED, at war and now poisoned, our spiral of decline is all the more difficult to stomach in a country that once prided itself as a beacon of peace in an otherwise putrid West Africa.

Presiding over the chaos that is Ivory Coast is Laurent Gbagbo, so hopeless he was the only politician allowed to stand by an even more inept and brutal military government at our last rigged elections six years ago. Like the army before him, Gbagbo wound up our delicate ethnic mix to label a popular and capable politician from the Islamic north as a foreigner, thus preventing him from participating in the constitutional process and hastening the slide to civil war.

Gbagbo also declared the failed 2002 coup that triggered a conflict unresolved to this day to be the work of our former colonial masters in France. He supported extremist gangs who rampaged through the streets of our once glittering commercial capital, Abidjan, attacking French people and property, foreigners, opposition newspapers and supporters.

Many of these angry youths were given Kalashnikovs and are now housed at camps in Abidjan and other cities. Dressed in khaki t-shirts, they can sometimes be seen jogging, chanting in unison – "Gbagbo, forever in power." This does not bode well for elections, delayed twice by UN approval and now due to take place next October.

Ethnic hatred, often disguised as support for constitutional values, turned Ivory Coast into a basket case – or, as aid donors put it, a Low Income Country Under Stress. Some 11,000 French and UN peacekeepers keep a watch on the chaos, and have become fodder for daily conspiracy theories churned out by ruling party supporters.

Our latest chemical waste scandal symbolises much that has gone wrong. In August, around 100,000 people were poisoned by toxic sludge. Dozens later died. The 400 tons of toxic waste were dumped in Abidjan by a ship leased by the London branch of Trafigura, an international oil trader caught up in bribery scandals in South Africa and Jamaica, and under investigation in the Iraq oil-for-food scandal. Trafigura figured Ivory Coast was the best place to dump the stuff, after the waste was found to contain lethal hydrogen sulphides and residues from refining oil.

The company recommended to evacuate the lethal liquid, Tommy, was set up as long ago as, er, earlier this year and operates out of a two-room apartment in an Abidjan slum. Tommy had no experience in removing any kind of waste from ships and its licence did not allow it to deal with toxic waste. After the ship berthed, Tommy gathered a collection of tanker drivers to load what tests have shown to be by-products of illicit, substandard petroleum refining, carried out on-board. The poison was then dropped off at Abidjan's central, open air garbage dump near the main army barracks and at least 16 other sites near residential areas.

The next day Abidjan residents – including many soldiers – were already suffering from vomiting and pus-filled sores and began a series of violent protests. In one, they forced the transport minister to a polluted site and made him breathe in the fumes. In another the environment minister's house was burned down.

The government eventually resigned (only to be reformed minus a couple of ministers implicated in the affair); and several people were arrested – including Claude Dauphin, the French president of Trafigura, which still denies the waste was toxic. Despite the arrests, the only people to have been prosecuted are three staff members of Ivorian daily Le Jour, who were fined £15,000 for "insult to the head of state" after reporting that our First Lady was implicated in the scandal.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Muthuvatti Abdul is lucky to be alive," a spokesman for the Salmaniya Medical Complex told reporters in Bahrain, "but the damage is not irreparable and we are confident we can fix him. He is active, and able to digest normal food, and in a few days from now we will perform further surgery on his large intestine; but in my thirty years as a surgeon, I have never before seen such a case. Let this be a warning to all workers not to play jokes on each other with high-pressure air hoses."

Speaking from his hospital bed, Mr Abdul later explained how a prank at a building site near Alba had gone seriously wrong. "I had been sandblasting with my friend Shams, and we were covered in sand. So we stripped off naked and turned the hoses on ourselves, to clean ourselves. I was bending over when Shams inserted the nozzle up my rectum and gave me a quick blast of air. He only did it for a few seconds. It was just a joke, that's all. But I asked him to do it again out of interest. When he did, I immediately felt myself blowing up. I knew something inside was clearly wrong. So I came here to the hospital, where they examined me, and told me that the rush of air had burst my large intestine, and created an opening in my bowel. I have telephoned my family back in India to tell them I am off work, but they do not yet know why. They will be shocked when they hear the full story."

The spokesman added that "the high-pressure blast almost burst Mr Abdul's stomach, and if that had happened, it would have been impossible to repair the damage. People need to understand that these appliances are not a joke. In the wrong hands, and in the wrong place, they can kill." *(Hindustan Times, 29/9/06. Spotter: Alastair Mackie)*

– ● –

● *"The moment I saw her, it was love at first sight," Shoji Shibuzaki told the policemen who arrested him in the southern Japanese city of Maebara. "She was standing in the display window at the community centre, dressed in a kimono, and even though I knew she was only a mannequin, I was determined to make her mine. So I waited until 3am, when nobody was around, then broke into the centre and carried her off.*

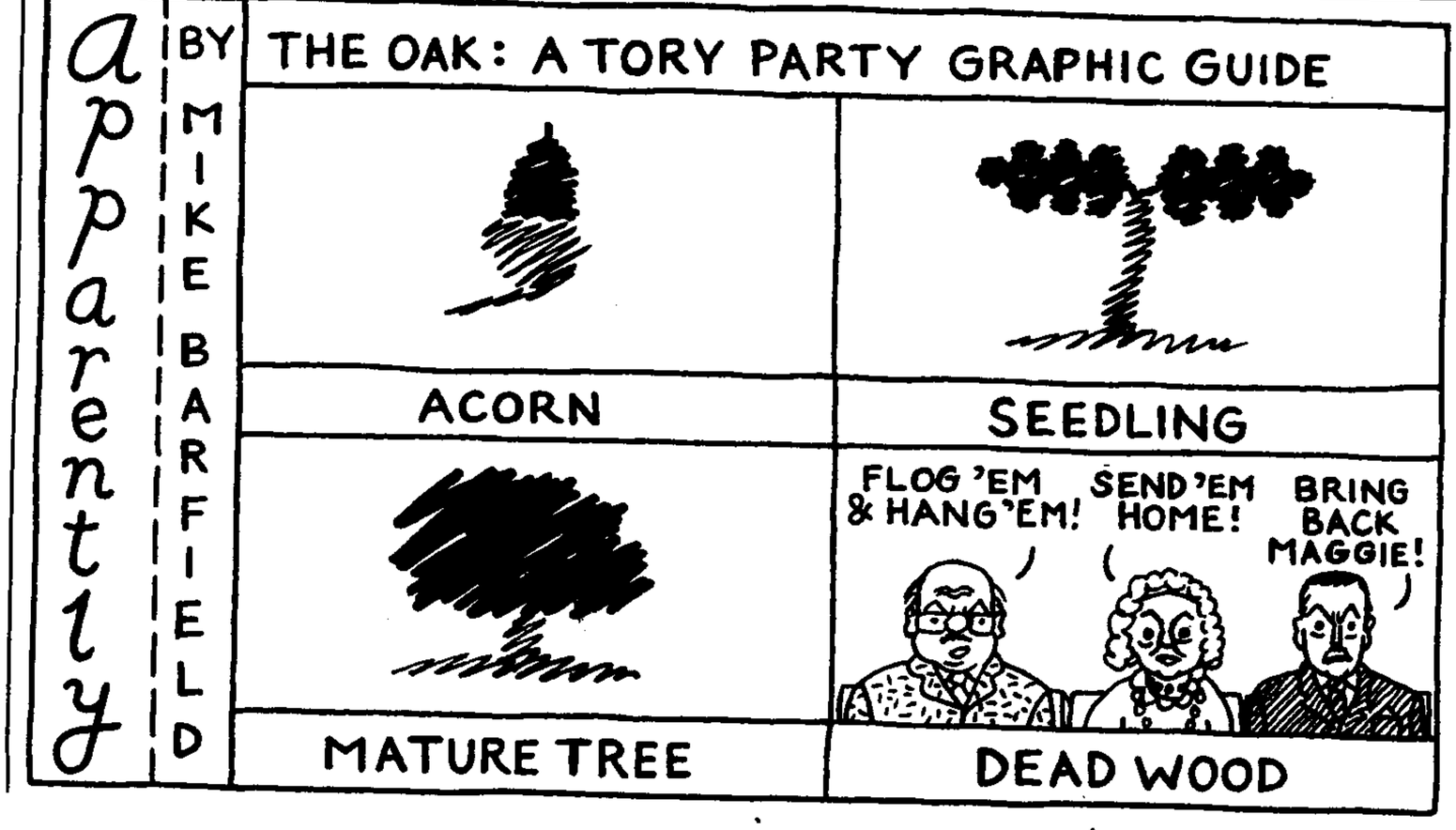
"But once I got her outside and looked more closely at her, I became disillusioned. The dummy looked rather eerie in close up, and was not nearly as attractive as she had seemed in the window. I also realised that she was far too

heavy to carry home. I was bitterly disappointed by her so, as an act of revenge, I stripped her of her clothes. And I was still trying to work out what to do with her next when you gentlemen arrived." (Asahi Shimbum, 30/8/06. Spotter: Simon Sholl)

– ● –

● "Alexei Ashurin was pushing the Volkswagen along the road when he signalled to us for assistance," Valery Buzovkin of the Moscow police force told reporters, "so we pulled over to lend a hand. He said he'd run out of gas, so we helped him push the car to the side of the road, but as we did so, we noticed something odd. There was a screwdriver sticking out of the ignition, and the lock on the driver's door had been damaged, so we asked to see his documents. And as soon as we did so, he broke down and confessed that he had stolen the car.

"When we looked at his previous convictions, we realised that he must be the most incompetent car thief in all Russia. Last year, he stole a car from outside a garage, without realising that it was there to have its brakes repaired. Minutes later, he tried to stop at a red light at an intersection, but couldn't, and slammed into a Jeep. And before that, he was arrested after stealing a car and passing out drunk behind the wheel. He really should try another profession. He's just not cut out to be a car thief." *(Moscow Times, 6/9/06. Spotter: Simon Long)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And this week my message is not addressed, as usual, to my congregation, but to a single individual – namely PC Yates, our local bobby.

This officer has for some reason taken it into his head that I and some of my colleagues on the PCC have been involved in some shady financial dealings.

And it's not April 1st. (You can check the date on the top of this newsletter if you're in any doubt!)

No, PC Yates really means it, although he has been told repeatedly that he is wasting not only his own time with his silly enquiries, but mine as well.

For weeks he has been hiding in the shrubbery in the vicarage garden, apparently peering through the kitchen window with his binoculars.

I even once saw him rummaging through one of the vicarage dustbins (the one that is clearly marked Green For Composting Only Alternate Tuesday Help Save The Planet With St Albion's Council), apparently hoping to find some of my bank statements or other receipts sent to some of our more respected parishioners, such as Mr Gulam Noon, the proprietor of St Albion's legendary curry emporium 'Some Like It Hot'.

Well, I can tell PC Yates here and now that, look as hard as he likes, he is never going to find anything – why does he think that I bought a shredder only the other day!

And it's not just me that PC Yates seems to be harassing in this totally uncalled-for way.

Several of my friends and colleagues have also been subjected to PC Yates's intimidation, being asked a whole lot of

The Vicar's constant companion – by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

impertinent questions about the parish's finances.

Poor Mr Patel, who runs our popular local retirement home for gentlefolk, Old People Яn't Us, found himself being "frisked" by our much-too-inquisitive policeman, who said that he was looking for old cheque stubs.

Most unforgivable of all was the treatment accorded to my tennis partner Mr Levy, who was about to set out on one of his regular pilgrimages to the Holy Land when PC Yates arrived at his door at 6 o'clock in the morning.

Mr Levy was unceremoniously dragged out of bed, handcuffed, and frogmarched down to the police station, wearing only a towelling dressing-gown bearing the legend 'Property of the Tel Aviv Hilton. Please Do Not Remove'.

When Mr Levy arrived he was told by one of PC Yates's colleagues that he was "under arrest" and that anything he said would not be believed!

Of course after a few hours they had to let Mr Levy go home, because they didn't have a scrap of evidence against him!

On top of it all, imagine my friend's embarrassment at having to wait for a bus in St Albion's High Street, wearing only his pyjamas and towelling robe!

Luckily he was spotted by Mr Gulam in his Rolls Royce, who gave him a lift home (even though they had never met!).

Anyway, I hope it hasn't escaped your notice that a great many of the people whom PC Yates seems to suspect of some crime or other are members of our ethnic minority communities.

Of course I am not saying that PC Yates is a racist. But if anyone were to suggest that he is, I would find it hard to disagree with them!

Perhaps PC Yates would like to remember this when he is down at the Britannia Arms, boasting about how he is going to "get the Vicar banged up"!

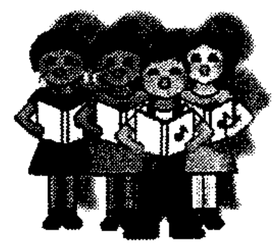
Perhaps it is high time that PC Yates stopped hiding in the laurel bushes outside my study window and turned his attention back to his proper job – i.e. solving the real crimes in our parish. Not of course that there are any!

Tony

Winter Courses

Mrs Beverley Hughes is organising a series of 'parenting' classes in the church hall, to help new parents learn how to sing nursery rhymes to their children in order to improve their cognitive and narratological development skills.

Her first talk will be a workshop on the traditional West Country rhyme which tells us how:



Blair and Brown
Went up to town
To dine at the Granita.
Brown fell down
And lost the crown
And Blair had a really good laugh!

(Trad.)

To Remember In Your Prayers

● Mr Brown who is in danger in Iraq, having bravely decided for some reason to pay a visit to Basra and have his photograph taken. Let us pray that nobody takes a pot shot at him just because they think he is trying to make himself look good and has got too big for his boots! T.B.

Parish Postbag

Dear Vicar,

I am terribly sorry that my critical remarks about your great crusade, which I made at a private dinner of the St Albion Alpha-Female Group, were reported in the press. Had I known that there were journalists present, I would, of course, have told a pack of lies.

Yours sincerely,
Mrs Margaret Hodge,
C/o Sunday Club, Paedophile Close.

Valete

MR SAINSBURY, who is leaving us to spend more time in his greenhouse with his GM fish-flavoured organic cauliflowers. As you will be aware, Mr Sainsbury has for many years been the most generous benefactor to the church, which is why we were so pleased to make him an honorary member of the PCC, with special responsibility for getting in the fruit and vegetables for our annual harvest festival. Which of us will ever forget the year our altar was decorated with singing carrots that glowed in the dark!

What a pity though that he should have spoiled it all at the end by deciding to resign just when we needed his money most! T.B.

• NEW VICAR PLEASE – St Albion Parish News Book 9 – On Sale Now •

THAT CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY WEDDING SERVICE IN FULL

What You Missed

The Chief Thetan, Dwight J. Nutzberger III *(for it is he)*: We are gathered together to celebrate the inter-stellar union of N and M *(here he may say 'Tom and Katie' or 'Tom and Tom's next wife')*. In the name of our founder, L. Ron Hubbard, may the ceremony commence.

(Here a suitable anthem shall be played, namely the theme tune from Battlestar Galactica*)*

Chief Thetan: Do you, Tom, promise to give us all your money as long as you shall live?

Tom: I do.

Chief Thetan: Do you, Katie, solemnly swear that you have come from another planet?

Katie: Humx Da Zungl Splob! *(American translation "Indeedy, doody!" from the original Zyrgon)*

Chief Thetan: I now pronounce you Level Seven Astro souls.

(There is then a collection in which the congregation hand over all their money to uniformed cybermen)

Chief Thetan: We lift up our wallets.

All: We lift them up to L. Ron!

The Recessional

The theme tune from Mission Impossible Three may be played, as the Bride and Groom depart in a spaceship for a fortnight's honeymoon on fashionable Krypton.

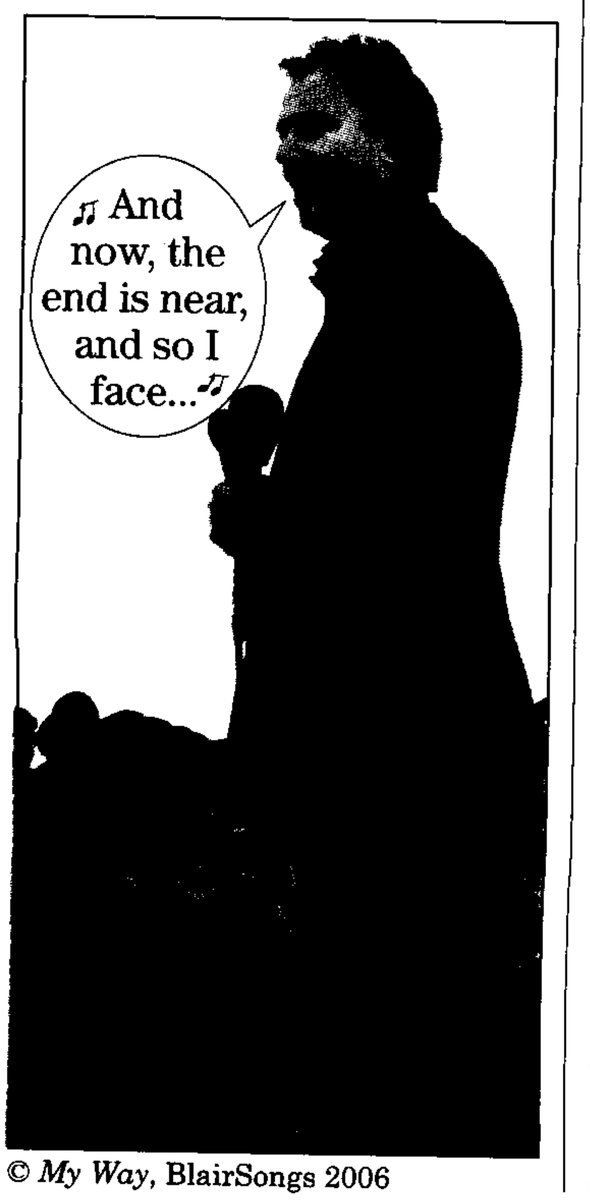
GUEST LIST IN FULL

Lady Poshella Beckham-Spice
Ms J-Lo
Mr Will Smith and the Men in Black
Mr John Travolta (via ectoplasm)
Mr Buzzwell Lightyear
Sir Chewbacca of That Wookey
Mr Flash Gordon (O.M.)
Ming The Useless
The Klangers

Apologies

Mr E.T, who was unable to attend as he had to go home.

TONY ENTERTAINS THE TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN



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"We've all got to pay for the lunch afterwards!"

This Week's Best-selling Xmas Titles

1. Do Wasps Eat Fish?
2. Do Penguins Fart?
3. Are Wallcharts Crap?
4. Is Schott Shit?
5. Is Shit Crap?
6. Do Wasps Fart?
7. Are Penguins Shit?
8. Does Schott Eat Wasps?
9. Jeffrey Archer Short Stories

(That's enough books)

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S SOUND OF NEW SICK! (Geddit?!??)

■ **SO Connie Fisher's been conning us all!?!! Geddit?! She's the new Maria, stoopid, who sang her way into our hearts on TV's 'How Do You Get Free Publicity For Your West End Show?' *(Is this right? Ed.)* We thought she was a wide-eyed girl next door with a voice like an angel!!?! How wrong we were!!?! Connie's no better than a two-timing temptress whose behind-the-scenes antics with a stagehand makes even me blush!?!! You've let your millions of fans down, sweetheart!?! You were meant to be a nun not a cheap slapper a-smirkin' and a-lurkin' with some frisky fella in the wings!?!! We wanted the Sound of Music – not the Sound of Bonking!!?! Geddit!!?!**

■ OI! MISTER Pressman!!?! Leave our Connie alone!?! She's the gal who sang her way into our hearts on TV's 'Strictly Come Nunning'!?!! *(Are you sure about this? Ed.)* OK, so she likes a bit of slap 'n' tickle with a hunky stagehand in the Edelweiss??!? Who doesn't?! She's just a healthy lass from the valleys who wants to live life to the full!!?! If she prefers the Sound of Bonking to the Sound of Music – who cares!!?!

■ *HERE THEY are – these are a few of my favourite men!?!*

● **John Reid!?!!** I'd like to spend 90 days detained with you, Big Boy!!?!

● **Sir Philip Green?!??** He's the BHS supremo who took Michael Jackson round his store in the middle of the night!?! Forget Wacko Jacko – I'll open up at midnight for you, Sir Philip!??! Geddit?!??

● **Daniel Craig!?!??** He's the best Bond ever!?!! Or is he rubbish!!?!! I can't remember what I think!??!! *(You're fired. Ed.)*

Byeeee!!!

ADVERTISEMENT

THE FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE ROYAL INFIRMARY TRUST PLC

Feeling ill? Had a heart attack? Or just plain dying?

Don't make the mistake of going to other hospitals like the local General Hospital or the Princess Margaret up the road because frankly they are rubbish!

No, for high quality healthcare treatment services, you can't beat the Florence. And if it doesn't work out we guarantee death with dignity.

And you can't say fairer than that.

Just look at what the Florence offers:

- **State of the art corridor trolley-beds**
- **Woman with bucket cleans *your* ward once a fortnight**
- **The very latest in top of the range superbugs guaranteed for every patient**
- **Doctors who speak every language except yours**
- **Free car parking facilities**
- **Choice of food (cold or very cold)**
- **World beating morgue facilities**

Says the late E.B. Wibbens:
"I was in and out of the Florence in no time at all"

Book yourself in now – even if you are well.
Because you won't be for long.
It's the health experience of a lifetime.
Hurry, hurry, while our hospital lasts because we've spent all the money on these stupid adverts.

BLAIR'S NEW IRAQ PLAN

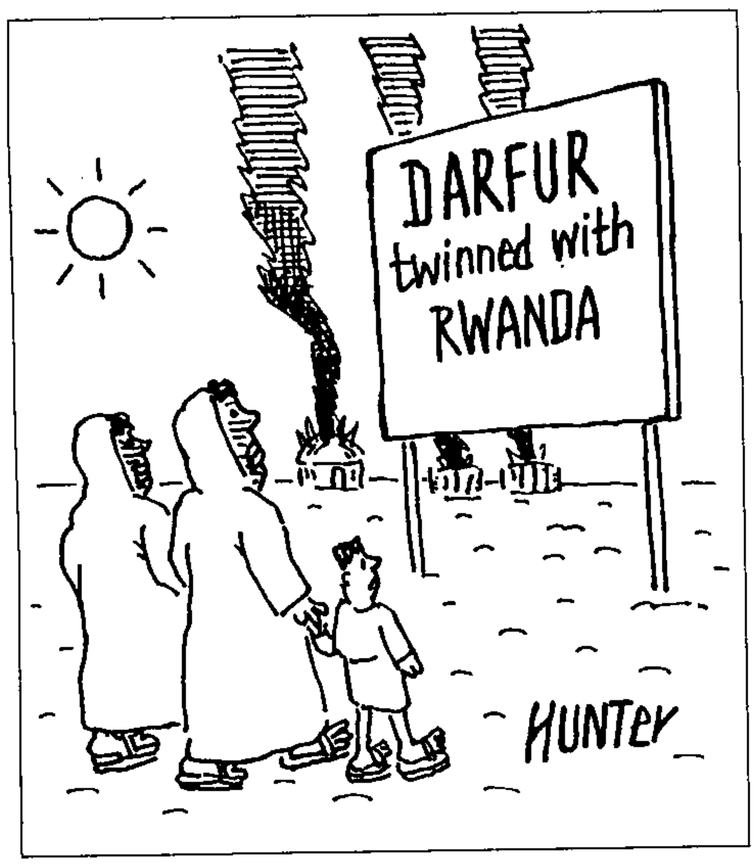
by Our Defence Staff **Max Hustings**

AS THE situation in Iraq worsened, the Prime Minister Tony Blair was forced to concede that Britain and the US would have to work with their traditional enemies in the Middle East. Even those whom he had recently condemned as "evil despots who promote terrorism" would have to be included in a new partnership to bring stability to the region.

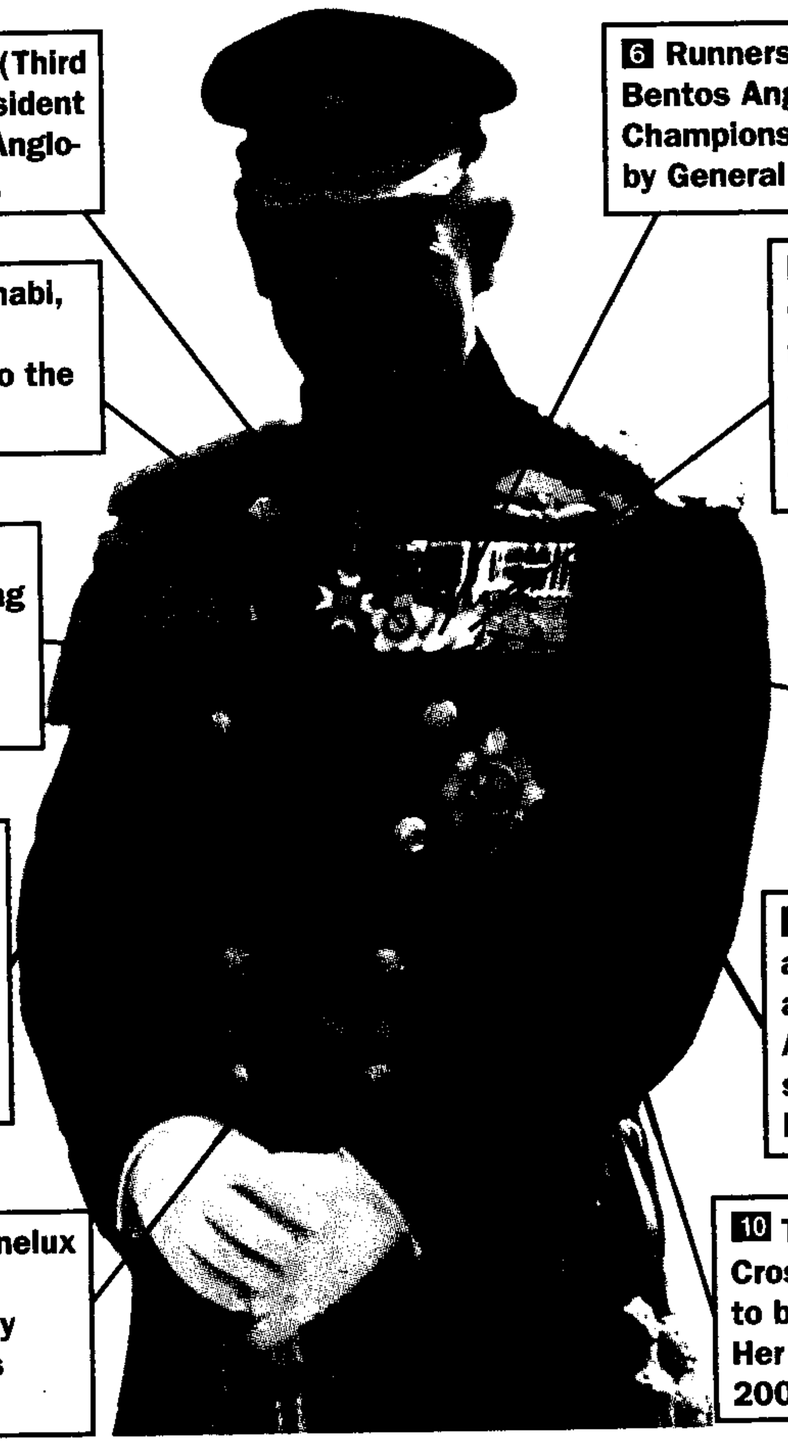
Said Mr Blair, "That is why it makes absolute sense to involve Saddam Hussein in the future administration of Iraq.

Oh What A Lonely War!

"He has a great deal of experience in cracking down on insurgents, locking up terrorists and preventing civil war. The sooner we hand over power to him the better."



Your Guide To Those Royal Medals



1 Order of St Smirnoff (Third Class), awarded by President Yeltsin for services to Anglo-Russian understanding.

2 Grand Star of Abu Dhabi, awarded by the Emir of Kashoggi for services to the armaments industry.

3 Croce d'Oro di Real Madrid, awarded by King Alfonso XI in a swap for the Grand Victorian Order of the Bath.

4 Congressional Medal for Supreme Valor, awarded by President Nixon during the Indo-China campaign, 1968-1975.

5 Silver Medal for Benelux Organic Biscuit of the Year, 1997, awarded by La Societé de Biscuits Organiques, Limoges.

6 Runners-up medal, Fray Bentos Anglo-Argentine Polo Championship, 1985, awarded by General Fascisto di Bastardi.

7 The Quentin Quinlan Gold Medal for Community Architecture, awarded 1999 for the design of Poundbury village.

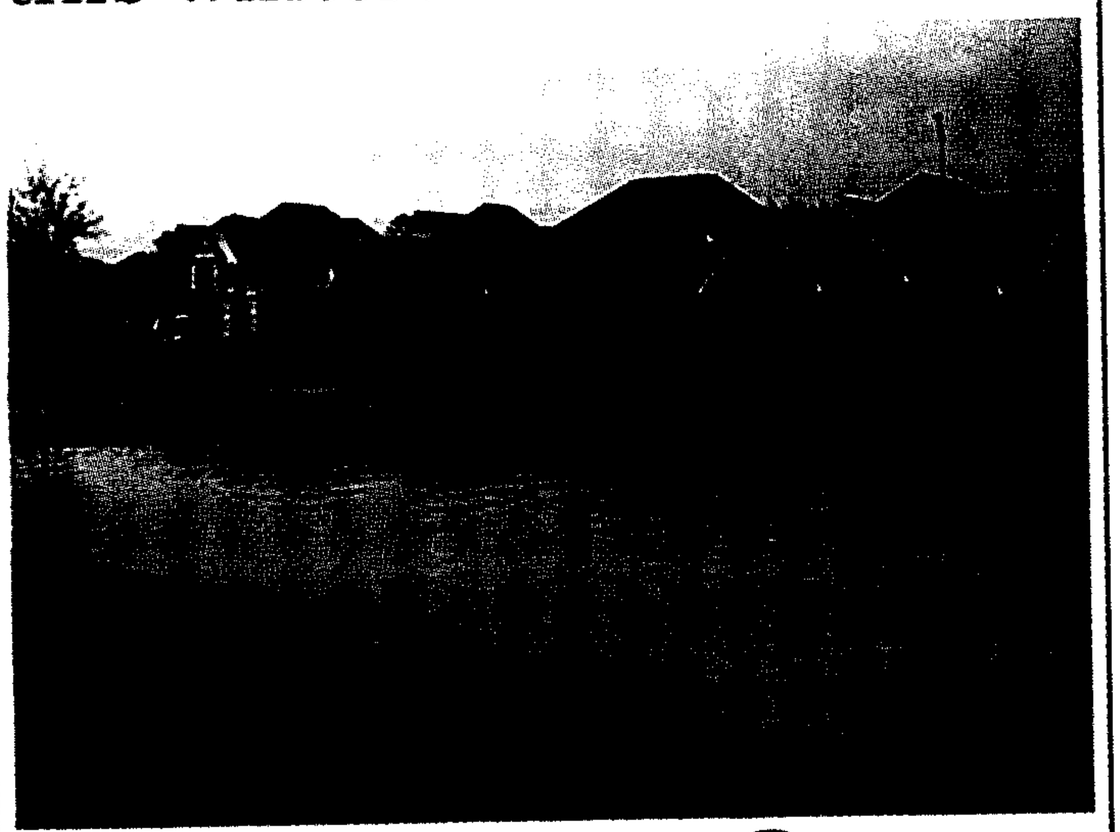
8 The Princes Trust Medal, for Best Prince Running a Trust, awarded by the Prince of Wales, 2005

9 The Crescent Moon and Star (Tehran), awarded by Imam Ahmedgeddon for services to Inter-Faith Dialogue.

10 The Queen Elizabeth II Cross for waiting around to be King, awarded by Her Majesty the Queen, 2003, to keep him quiet.

Charles pictured here in the uniform of Grand Air Marshal of the Fleet, Chief Admiral of the Royal Cycle Corps, Ruler of the Seven Seas, Master and Commandeer *(cont'd p.94.)*

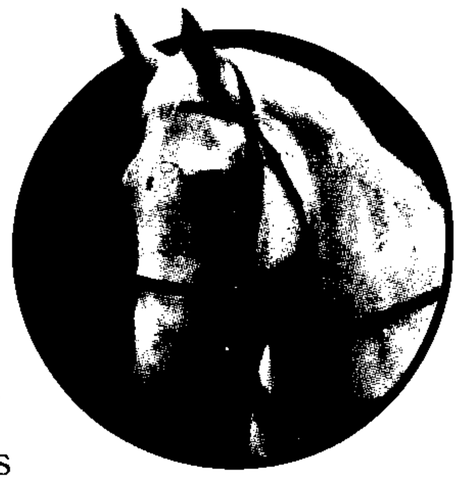
Worried about being flooded this winter?



Then don't buy a box home built on a fxxxing floodplain

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY
Here to help

FIRST EVER STATE FUNERAL FOR HORSE



BY OUR COURT STAFF LUNCHTIME O'GLUES

MILLIONS lined the streets of London yesterday to pay their last respects to the horse they knew simply as 'Dessie'.

Desert Orchid, to give him his full title, was the horse which kept the nation going during the dark days of the 1980s and 1990s.

As the massive gun carriage moved slowly down the Mall towards his final resting place in Westminster Abbey's 'Knacker's Corner', between Sir John Betjeman and Edward the Confessor, punters wept openly at their tragic loss.

Her Majesty the Queen laid a special wreath of orchids on behalf of the entire nation, as the band of the Horse Guards sounded the Last Winning Post.

Flags flew at half mast, as the capital came to a halt for Londoners to observe a two-minute silence in honour of the passing of the most iconic animal in Britain's history.

Giving the eulogy, a visibly moved Tony Blair, clutching the traditional onion, told the congregation, "He won all our hearts, we will never be the same again."

"Truly," said the prime minister, "he was the People's Horse."

CHILDREN IN NEED

Newsreaders To Dress Up As Newsreaders

by our TV Staff **Pudsey Bore**

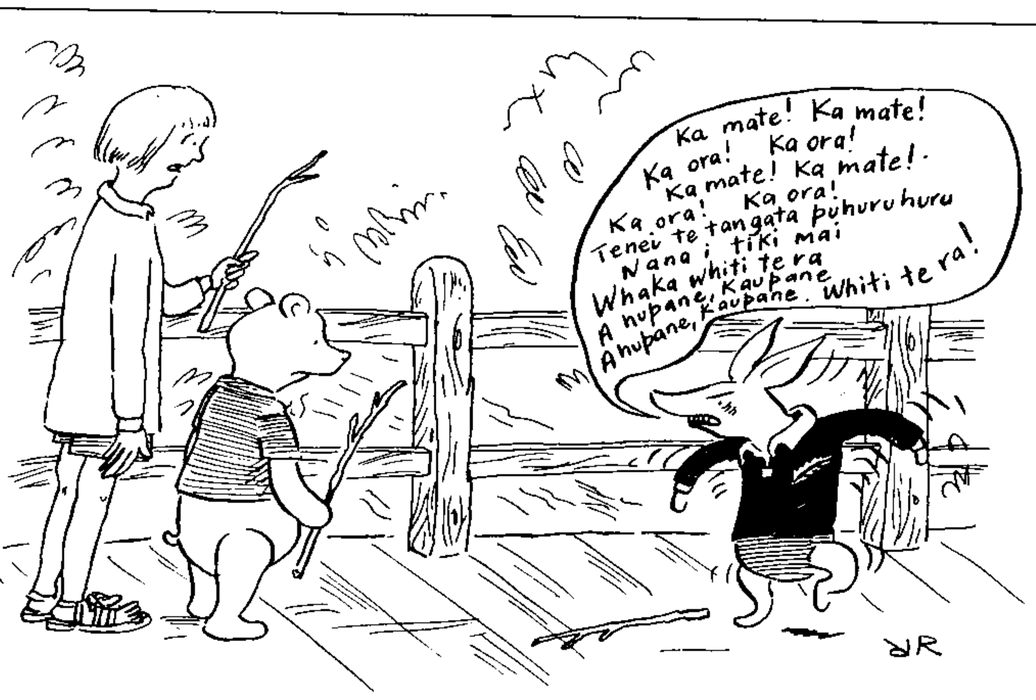
IN AN hilarious new send up of themselves, members of the BBC news team are to don outfits and read the news.

"It's a far cry from their usual image." said a spokesman, "We're used to seeing the likes of Jeremy Bowen dressed up as a Bond villain or Andrew Marr in fishnet tights.

"But we wanted to give viewers something out of the ordinary," he continued, "so we came up with this madcap idea of Natasha Kaplinsky and co. delivering the day's headlines wearing suits and smart dresses.

"Obviously they were a bit nervous about making fools of themselves but in the end they loved it."

He concluded, "After all it is what the BBC's for!"



*"Goodness, Piglet, it's **only** a game of Poohsticks!"*

DID O.J. COMMIT MURDOCH?

by Our Crime Staff **Homer Simpson**

TOP murderer O.J. Simpson was last night the centre of a row over his admission that he was guilty of Murdoch.

"Yes," he said. "I took money from Rupert and cold-bloodedly put it in my pocket."

Asked if he regretted it, Mr Simpson said, "It was not premeditated. I acted in the heat of the moment. I saw Rupert waving the cheque and I grabbed it, in what I can only describe as a fit of greed."

● O.J. Simpson's new book *How I Made A Killing* is published by The First Degree Murdoch Press, c/o Fox-Up TV, News International.

— 1984 —

(Revised 2006 Edition)

IT WAS a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly though the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.

Inside the flat a fruity voice was reading out a list of figures which had something to do with the Government's endless war on terror. The voice came from an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror which formed part of the surface of the right-hand wall.

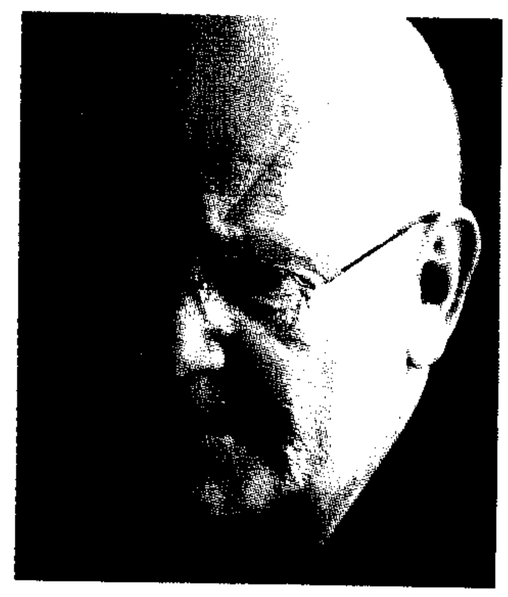
"Our war on terror to defeat Syria and Iran is at an end.

"Our war on terror with our partners Syria and Iran has just begun."

(Cont. p. 94)

Advertisement

DRUGS RUIN LIVES



If you're thinking of dabbling in drugs, just look at this shocking picture.

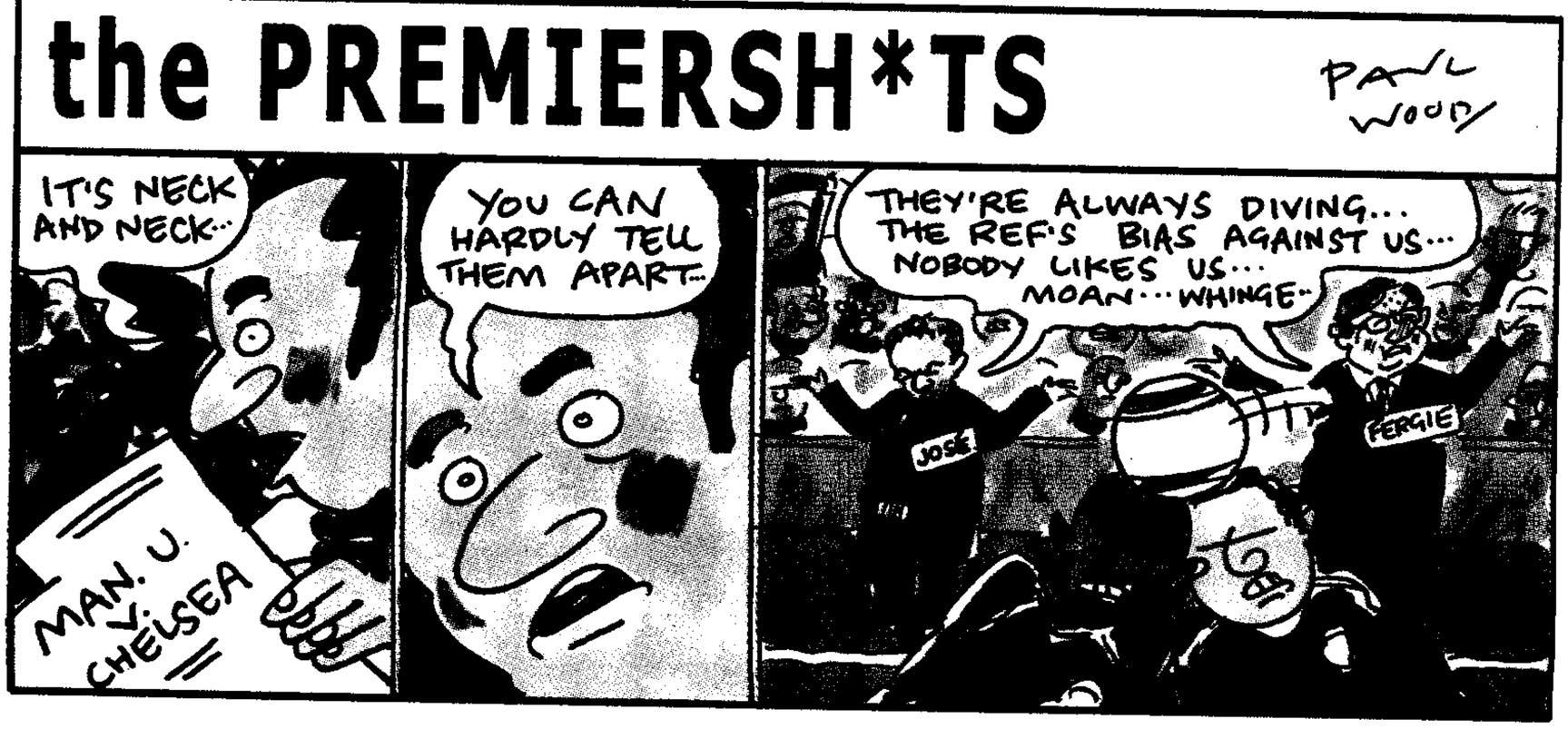
JOHN REID once had a bright future. He was even being tipped as a possible Prime Minister. But then he got mixed up in drugs. His life spiralled down to the point where he was forced to hand over £750,000 of public money to heroin addicts for denying them drugs in prison.

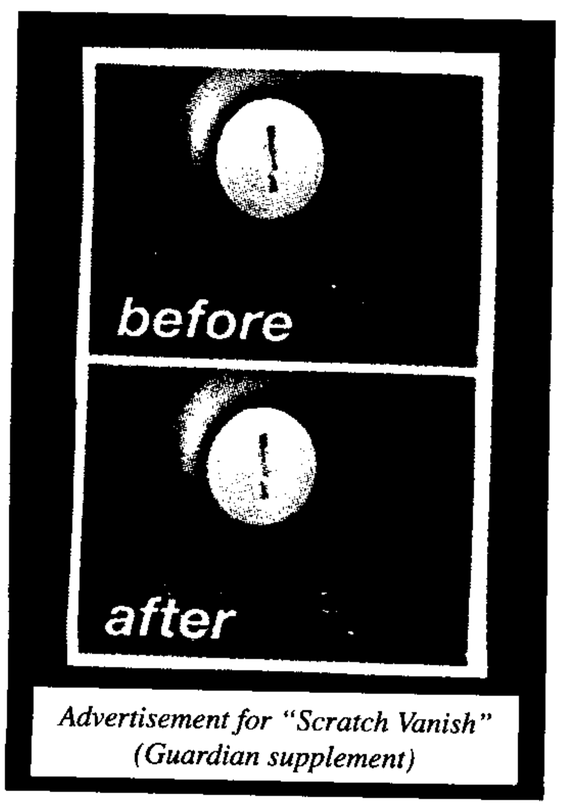
Just look at him now, a sad, wretched, broken figure.

Thanks to heroin, Reid's no longer 'Fix for Purpose'.

Phone the Government's 14 hour Drugs Hotline now.
● Press 1 if you want to sue for being denied heroin in jail,
● Press 2 if you want to sue for being denied methadone in jail,
● Press 3 for all other Class A drugs.

the PREMIERSH*TS


PAUL WOOD
IT'S NECK AND NECK...
MAN. U. V. CHELSEA
YOU CAN HARDLY TELL THEM APART...
THEY'RE ALWAYS DIVING... THE REF'S BIAS AGAINST US... NOBODY LIKES US... MOAN... WHINGE...
JOSE
FERGIE



Advertisement for "Scratch Vanish" (Guardian supplement)

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Jack Palance, Hollywood Cowboy

So. Farewell then
Jack Palance.

You were famous
As the 'man in black' –
The bad guy
In *Shane*
Who sat in the corner
Drinking coffee
When Alan Ladd
Walked into
The saloon.

It's hard to believe
That you weren't also in
The Magnificent Seven.

All together now –
Dum di-da-da-dum
Dum di-da-da-dum
Da-da
Di-da-DA-da...

E.J. Thribb (17½)

Grim Reality TV

I'm A Liability Get Me Out Of Here

INTERNATIONAL celebrities George and Tony find themselves in the middle of Iraq and try to find a way out. Each week they have to complete the "Bush Fucker Trial" or else they get voted out!

In tonight's most disgusting scene, George has to eat his words whilst surrounded by horrible creepy-crawlies (Tony).

Who will win? Will it be Osama? *(Continued for years)*

Tesco Corner

Organic pasteurised homogenised whole milk.
Allergy advice: • Contains **milk.**

CHANGING FACE OF AMERICAN POLITICS

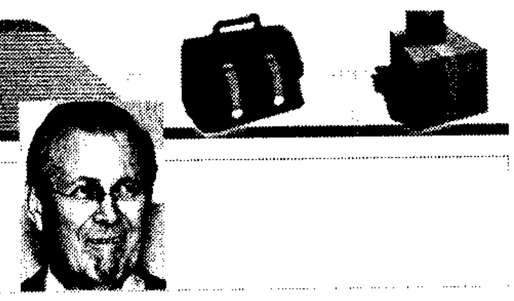
2000

Lame Fuck President

2006

Lame Duck President

My eBay



cut-and-Rum (2,863)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-2 of 2 items)

		Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐	"Improve Your Golf" hardback - vol 2: 'Sandtraps and Bunkers'	$4.99	$2.99	1
☐	"Rambo" complete films box-set Stallone DVDs	$19.99	$5.99	1

Items I'm Selling (1-4 of 4 items)

		Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐	"I'm With Stupid" men's T-shirt, worn, XL	$4.99	$2.50	0
☐	Assorted road maps, hardly used	$3.99	$1.50	0
☐	"Guide to Plain English" paperback, unread, as new	$2.50	$1.50	0
☐	Collection of soldiers, several regiments, many damaged or missing	$19.99	$4.00	0

RADICAL SOLUTION TO OLYMPIC BUDGET CRISIS

by Our Construction Staff **Bobski The Builder**

AS THE bill for the Olympics threatens to soar above £5bn, the government has come up with an exciting new plan to keep the costs down whilst ensuring that the project is delivered on time.

The scheme involves constructing the Olympic stadium, the velodrome and the athletes' village from a new type of building material.

Said Lord Coe, chairman of the Olympic committee, "Instead of bricks we are going to use unsold copies of David Blunkett's memoirs.

"They are heavier than breezeblocks, denser than reinforced concrete and more impenetrable than sold steel."

He continued, "There are literally millions of these handy building components available just lying around unused all over the country and they cost almost nothing.

"The Olympic project is back on track – a track made out of Chapter 17 ('I Was Right And Everyone Else Wasn't')."

News In Brief

HATED TYRANT SENTENCED TO 'HANG AROUND"

THERE were scenes of jubilation in Washington today as hated former President George Bush was sentenced by his people at the mid-term elections to "hang around" for the next two years as a powerless leader who *(cont. p. 94)*

MAN 'NOT SUING ANYONE'

THERE was astonishment today after it was revealed that a Mr G. Felton of Milton Keynes wasn't planning to sue anyone.

"I've decided not to take anyone to court to seek substantial damages for falling down a set of steps in the underground/being forced to go cold turkey/having a botched operation," Mr Felton told reporters. "I'm just going to get on with my life as best I can without blaming anyone else for my misfortunes."

However, it later emerged that Mr Felton is now planning to sue several newspapers for reporting that he wasn't planning to sue anyone.

NEW-LOOK QUEEN No. 94

"Oh, my God! I'm going bald!"

That Queen's Speech In Full

1. Pensions

As a means of saving on public expenditure, my government proposes to raise the pension age to 82 by the year 2063.

2. Climate Change

As a means of saving the planet, my government proposes to reduce carbon emissions by 110 percent by the year 2094.

3. Road Charging

As a means of raising a lot of money and saving the planet at the same time, my government proposes to introduce a charge on motorists for using the roads at the rate of £10 a mile by the year 3015.

4. Government Reform

As a means of annoying Gordon, my government has no proposals for moving out of 10 Downing Street before 3050 or in ten minutes' time, whichever is the sooner.

"Slow down, Mr Takahashi"

Exclusive from Gnomemark

A Calendar That Doesn't Feature People In The Nude In A Variety Of Poses

This Christmas, why not treat yourself to a calendar that doesn't feature ordinary people raising money for charity by getting their kit off?

This unique calendar is sure to be a talking point with friends and family as the year progresses and you reveal another landmark month that doesn't feature some wrinkly old codger in the buff, with his naughty bits cunningly obscured by a colander, a combine harvester, or a bunch of carrots.

Send £9.99 plus £2 p&p to "My God! They Haven't Got Their Kit Off For Charity Calendar", Gnome Enterprises, London.

Nursery Times

November 24, 2006

SMALL BOY ARRESTED AS EMPEROR OPENS PARLIAMENT

By Hans Muslim Andersen

A SMALL boy who shouted at the Emperor during yesterday's *ceremonial* opening of Parliament was arrested and charged with offences under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Asboo!

As the Emperor Tony I processed toward the Grand Imperial Council Chamber, winning admiration from all present for the magnificence of his new suit, spun by the tailors Campbell and Mandelson, the small boy, whose name cannot be revealed for security reasons, shouted out, "Look, everyone, the Emperor hasn't got any policies." *(Surely 'clothes'? Ed.)*

Doesn't Suit You, Sir

Immediately the Emperor's security guards jumped on the small boy and charged him with the new offence of Threatening-The-Security-Of-The-Realm-By-Making-Comments-Critical-Of-The-Emperor-Within-2-Kilometres-Of-The-Council-Chamber-When-He-Is-Not-Wearing-Any-Clothes.

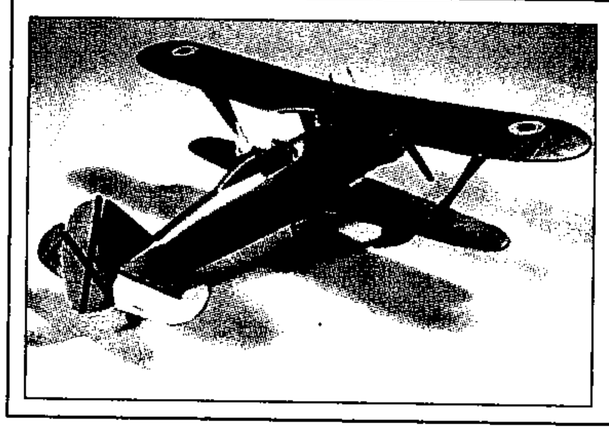
On Other Pages

● Three Blind Mice, given retinal cell implants, recover sight but claim basic animal rights abused. Did you ever see such a thing in your life? asks farmer's wife **p2**

● Boy Georgie Porgy Kisses Girl Shock **p94**

Advertisement

NEW FROM AIRFIX

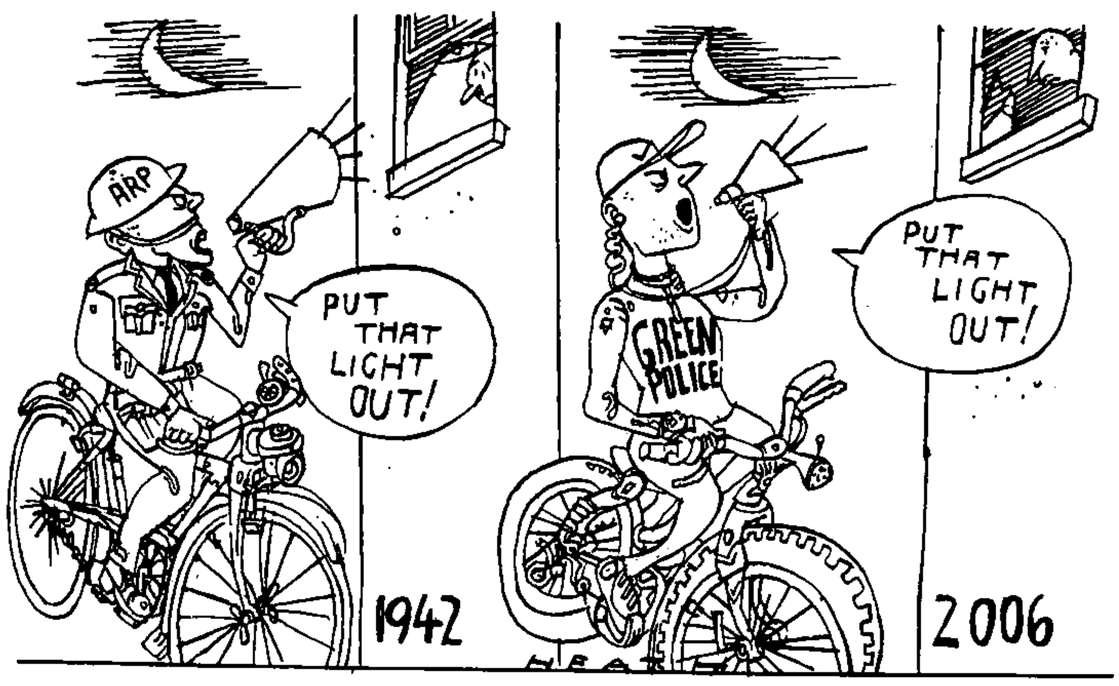


THE TAKE-OVER KIT

INSTRUCTIONS

- **Affix company A to Company B.**
- **That's it.**

AIRFIX HORNBY



DAILY TELEGRAPH | Friday, 24 November 2006

Letters *to the Editor*

The C-Charge Debate

SIR – Once again, London's so-called Mayor, Mr Livingstone, has demonstrated his juvenile left-wing agenda by proposing a punitive daily tax on those of us whose lifestyle requires us to drive an off-road four-wheel drive vehicle around the difficult and hazardous terrain of Sloane Square and its environs. How typical of this friend of Communist dictator Hugo Chavez (not to mention Fidel Castro and Josef Stalin) that he wishes to eradicate all London's wealth-creating class just as he did the pigeons of Trafalgar Square who were cruelly mown down in a genocidal holocaust.

Sir Neville Gassington-Guzzler
1 Eton College Square, London SW4 X4.

SIR – Shouldn't the Mayor's disingenuous new proposal be called the **"con"**-gestion charge?
Mike Giggler
Via email.

The Guardian Friday November 24 2006

Letters and emails

Debate Over The C-Charge

I would like to congratulate London's Mayor, Ken Livingstone, for his brave and imaginative decision to impose a £25-a-day congestion charge on all these sickening and totally polluting, gas-guzzling, planet-destroying Chelsea Tractors, driven by stupid, toffee-nosed women whom I hate. Thanks, Ken, from all of us real Londoners who can't afford a car and wouldn't drive one even if we could, er...
Steve Spartson
Lecturer in Environmental Transport Studies, University of Hackney (formerly the Bus Ticket Museum).

Shouldn't the Mayor's amusing new proposal be called the con-"jest"-ion charge?
Mike Giggler
Via email.

"Before I read your mother's will, I'd like each of you to put one of these on..."

EXCLUSIVE TO THE DAILY TELEGRAPH
Edited by R2DT

Archbishop Slams Women Priests

By Our Ecclesiastical Staff
Phil Pews

THE CHURCH of England was rocked to its foundations yesterday when the Archbishop of Canterbury launched an astonishing all-out assault on women priests, claiming that they would soon have to be scrapped as a major historical blunder.

Last night, senior figures in the Church were predicting that Rowan Williams's shock outburst would lead to a schism of unparalleled proportions and almost certainly the end of the C of E as we know it.

What the Archbishop said:
"Well, you know, I've always been a great supporter of the ordination of women and the church's commitment to a more inclusive agenda has been in no way changed by the common experience of the great majority of churchgoers as they have increasingly come to appreciate the contribution made by female ordinands to the shared spiritual and pastoral life of the Anglican communion in a very real sense but it is not entirely unimaginable that in the future there may be attempts to rethink the theological position but I cannot see that there is genuinely any way back *(cont. p. 94)*

© The Daily Rubbishgraph 2006.

Critics complain at product placement in new Bond film

by our Film Staff **Plenty O'Loot**

THE OPENING of "Casino Royale" was overshadowed this week by complaints about the blatant product placement in the new movie, which features plugs for watches, cars and computers.

But critics have been most exercised by the new infamous love scene which they claim was marred by the clumsy insertion of advertorial consumer promotion.

THAT SCENE IN FULL

Scene 94

(In the bedroom of Royale Casino Hotel. Night. Bond girl is naked in huge bed under silk sheet.)

Bond: The name's Bond. James Bond.

Bond Girl: The name's Girl. Bond Girl. *(Pause)* Won't you join me, Mr Bond?

Bond: Not so fast, Bond Girl. First I have to use this ingenious gadget.

Bond Girl: What is it?

Bond: It's a Gnomeby Trouser Press.

Bond Girl: Gnomeby? They're the First Name in Trouser Pressing.

Bond: Yes, and I have a feeling that things are about to get *steamy*.

(Bond takes off his trousers and expertly removes creases using the Gnomeby 007 Trouser Press.™)

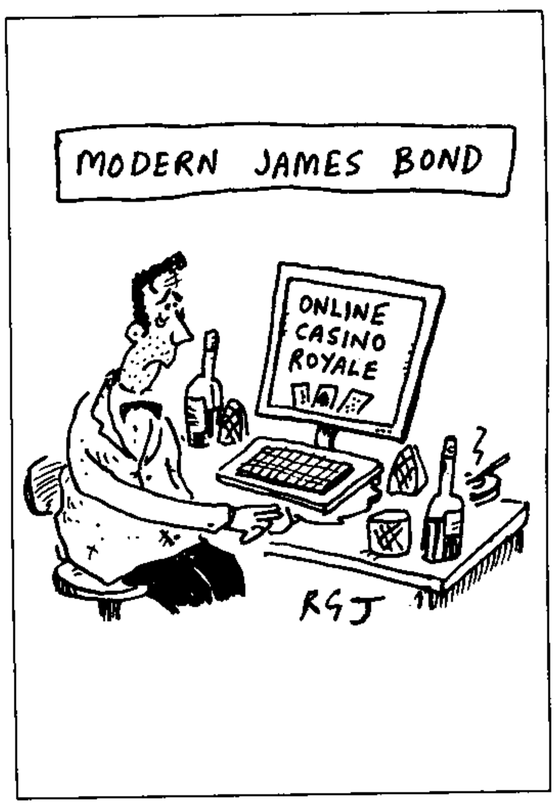
The producers of the film have denied placing commercial interests above the storyline. Last night they told reporters "Buy a Ford car! Now!"

Copyright all newspapers

IS THIS THE BEST PUBLICITY ABOUT A BOND FILM EVER?

PR AGENCIES have hailed the publicity surrounding the latest Bond film 'Casino Royale' as the "best yet".

"It's a real return to the stripped down, in your face, brutal no-nonsense publicity blitz that used to accompany Sean Connery's Bond films in the '60s."



DIARY

MELVYN BRAGG MEETS GEORGE MICHAEL

MELVYN: Michael George shot to fame as a leading member of the trio Whim! As a signwriter, sorry, songwriter, he has achieved international success by writing acclaimed songs such as um er, by writing several um famous songs. Michael George is now internationally acknowledged as a erm, as a leading erm, singer, indeed as one of the most singery and singerest singers, erm, of his generation. On the eve of his first World Tour since his last, Michael George gave us this exclusive insight into the way he erm...

* * *

GEORGE: Super to see you, Melvyn! How you doin'? Ooh, you smell nice! Mmmm...doesn't he smell nice, boys?

MELVYN: Can we start with the early days, Michael. You began life, am I right in thinking, in the womb?

GEORGE: Too right, Melvyn. Frankly I've never been so frustrated, all cooped up in there, with such terrible lighting, and so uncomfabaw, without any real means of expressing myself as a gay foetus, I mean I was forced to just lie there for months on end looking like goodness knows what, it was so humiliating and I can't bear to be negative about anything in this world but I had this great sense of darkness in there and I didn't really know how I was going to emerge and that's kind of upsetting for a major creative artist like myself, and then when I did come out, thank you very much, I was just made to lie there in a pair of nappies without any form of public redress because at that stage I wasn't able or allowed to speak out, it was so unfair, and you know as a gay baby wanting to lead a gay baby's lifestyle according to my own principles without compromising my identity I was overwhelmed by this terrible sense of the injustice of it all, it was just horrific.

MELVYN: Zzzzzzzz. Zzzzzzzz. *(wakes with a start)* Where am I? Who are you? Where were we?! Yes! Can we start with the early days, Michael. You began life, am I right in thinking, as a – no sorry. Let's move on. After being a foetus and then a baby for – what? one or two years – you then, am I right in thinking, proceeded to become a child, in your case a boy?

GEORGE: Yes, Melvyn, I was indeed a child in those early years, forced by this society we live in to go around dressed as a child and behaving as a child and it was an experience that I wouldn't wish on anyone, it was cruel, you see I was so vownrabaw, it was really eating me up, when all I wanted was my dignity and my self-determination and the whole process of like being a child made me understand something about how this government really manipulates us into believing – sorry Melvyn, can we stop for a sec? You know what? I'm feeling a bit sweaty. Do I look sweaty to you, Melvyn? Now, be honest!

MELVYN: Hm?

GEORGE: D'you know, Melvyn, I'm feeling a bit sweaty?

MELVYN: Um. No. Remind me. How does it go?

* * *

MELVYN: Your song, "Hey, Hump Me, Hump Me, Baby, I'm Your Kinda Guy" was written as a response to the invasion of Iraq.

GEORGE: I was that livid, I really was, Melvyn. It was when I heard that Tony was going to invaderate Iraq. Honestly, that guy had no business to, I don't care if he is Prime Minister or whatever! As a sexually active gay man, I felt that no-one should put up with this kind of invasion, I mean, how would YOU feel if one morning there was a ding-dong on your doorbell and all sorts of soldiers and what-not just sort of marched their way in uninvited and without their VIP passes or anything? I mean, it all comes back to human nature, doesn't it, Melvyn? So I thought, I'm not having this, this calls for a protest, and so I thought I'd show my anger against the whole war thing in a very very smooth, very very protesty, very very sexy sort of song, and I'd like to sing it for you all now.

MELVYN: Zzzzzz. Sorry?

GEORGE: I'd love to sing it for you all now.

MELVYN: Sing what?

GEORGE: My protesty song, silly!

MELVYN: That would be tremendous. So would it be true to say that what are you saying is that it would be true to say that you are a um singer as well as a signwriter?

GEORGE: Yes, silly!

MELVYN: That's extraordinary. You certainly kept that quiet!

GEORGE *(singing)*: "Oooooh!
Hey, hump me, hump me, hump me, baby!
I'm your kinda guy!
And if you go and invade Iraq again
You'll only make me cry!
Ooooh! Hump me! Ooooh! Ooooh!"

* * *

GEORGE: And the result of my protest? Rumsfeld gets the push! The Americans now know that the next time they lift a finger against a foreign country, they'll have George Michael and his fanbase to deal with. In their eyes, I am now officially part of the problem. It's not something they'll ever forgive. That's why the second I'm found cruising on Hampstead Heath as part of a sexually active gay male lifestyle, the White House is straight on the phone to Murdoch ordering him to print the news throughout the world. Friends told me I was mad to take on the American war machine, but that's the kind of guy I am – if I want to cruise in a dignified manner as part of a gay male lifestyle, then I'm not going to let Dick Cheney stop me by threatening to invade Hampstead Heath and bomb me sky-high, thank you very much, Melvyn. I'm now 43 years old, would you believe, and no matter what happens – actually, sorry, Melvyn, can we stop a mo? I'm getting really ever so sweaty! Melvyn? Melvyn?

MELVYN: Zzzzzz. Eh? Eh? Where am I? This morning on In Your Time, we investigate the nature and role of Manichaean Dualism in 3rd century Persia.

GEORGE: "Squeeze me, squeeze me, you sexy thing!
I don't wannna cause no disruption,
So – oooh! – let me be your weapon of mass destruction!
Oooh! Oooh! Oooh!"

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

I HAD A LOVELY SURPRISE FROM DEBS WHEN I GOT HOME YESTERDAY, BARRY...
YEAH?
SHE'D MADE THE DINING ROOM LOOK REALLY LOVELY... SILK DRAPES, CANDELABRAS, MOODY LIGHTING; THE WORKS...
AH...
SO YOU HAD A SURPRISE ROMANTIC EVENING IN? JUST THE TWO OF YOU?
NAH...
SHE'D ARRANGED AN INTERVIEW WITH KIRSTY WARK. I'D NEVER BEEN ON NEWSNIGHT BEFORE.
NICE ONE MATE.

Literary Review

Justice is bland

The Innocent Man
John Grisham
(Century, £18.99)

THIS is a new departure for Grisham. After writing a string of alleged thrillers about fictitious lawyers and their clients, he has now turned his attention to a true miscarriage of justice. In so doing, he may be said to have invented a new genre: the legal non-thriller.

Given that its publisher had labelled it "true crime", I feared this book might prove no more than a luridly sensational retelling of a grisly murder and its aftermath. Or, worse still, that Grisham might claim "artistic" validation for his profitable treatment of a real life tragedy, like Edna O'Brien's *In the Forest* (see *Eye* 1056). My fears proved quite unfounded. So scrupulous has this former attorney been, to avoid any hint of the crude sensationalism associated with his usual fare, that the resulting book reads with all the page-turning pizzazz of a musty old court transcript. It's factual. It's respectful. And it's very, very dull.

The scene is a small town in Oklahoma. The town is called Ada. The folks are homely and their homes are, by and large, safe. This is a God-fearing community, or at any rate a God-worshipping one: on page 2 we learn that the population of just 16,000 is served by no fewer than 50 active churches. That seems quite a high ratio by C of E standards, but we are reminded that Ada in Oklahoma is Bible-belt country.

That such a quiet, devout community should be "rocked" by the brutal rape and murder of a young barmaid in 1982 seems, therefore, unsurprising. That police and prosecutors should strive to find the perpetrator and bring him to justice is also just as one would expect. That they should pick on a local bozo and drunk-about-town, who already had a couple of rape allegations to his name, and do their stumbling utmost to make what paltry evidence they hadn't overlooked support a case against him, will likewise cause few observers of the American criminal justice system to gasp or stretch their eyes. That the jury, blinded with junk forensics and small town prejudice, and anxious to see right by the victim's family, should then convict him, and send him off to death row to await his doom, seems more than naturally to follow from all that has happened so far.

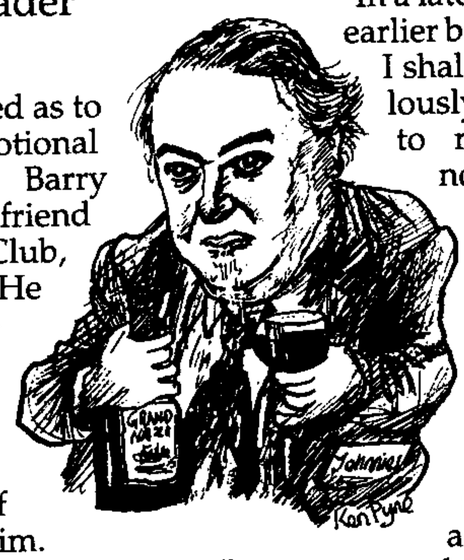
The story is, in other words, familiar. If this were a Grisham novel, we would now expect the intervention of the hero, a conscientious legal footsoldier, who would embark on an initially thankless but ultimately triumphant crusade to secure justice for the downtrodden victim of the system. And predictably enough, this is exactly what happened. The case was picked up at the last possible moment, on a habeas corpus application pursued with routine hopelessness by the indigent prisoner's poorly funded lawyer, and came to the attention of a federal judge who happened to delve a little deeper than his colleagues on the bench.

With the benefit of hindsight, of course, all miscarriages are avoidable and in this case it was not just hindsight that became available long after the original investigation that put a man on death row for a crime he didn't commit. Fresh DNA evidence has reopened many apparently closed cases, including this one. The original conviction was not exactly watertight, and the fact that another man was later convicted for the murder, and that he was one of the jailhouse snitches on whose testimony the original conviction rested, does not inspire confidence. But it's not exactly hard to be wise after the event and Grisham's achievement here is basically to dig over the ground with a diligent hoe and apply a top dressing of moral indignation.

Why is it all so predictable? Because it's exactly what you'd expect to find in the plot of a John Grisham novel. And herein lies the paradox. Grisham's fictional oeuvre is based on the proposition that the American legal system is riddled with prejudice and corruption. For Grisham himself to then wax indignant about a real case conforming to the very stereotype which he has identified seems, as it will no doubt make him, a little rich.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

The Life of Kingsley Amis
Zachary Leader
(Cape £25)



...OPINIONS differed as to Amis's precise emotional state at this time. Barry Refill, a lifelong friend from the Garrick Club, maintained that "He was a real gentleman to the last. I mean, if he'd had six gin-and-tonics he'd go on and drink a seventh if you bought it for him. That was the kind of man he was." A dinner with the novelist Julian Barnes, however, displayed this titanic literary figure in less flattering light. Amis arrived, to quote Barnes, "in a not terribly good mood." Offered a glass of Chateau Mouton-Rothschild 1953 he flung the bottle on the floor with a shout of "This wine's piss" before asking his host "I suppose you're writing some fucking book aren't you?" The conversation then moved on to address the situation in apartheid-era South Africa. "Basically, we need to line all the niggers up against the wall and shoot them" Amis deposed before collapsing in a pile of vomit. Barnes admitted that the evening "really wasn't what you might call a success".

In a later conversation with an earlier biographer about whom I shall attempt to be scrupulously fair, Amis attempted to rationalise these pronouncements. "Basically we need to line all the niggers up against a wall and shoot them" meant "I am afraid the prospect of Mr Mandela's release is somewhat remote." "I suppose you're writing some fucking book aren't you?" meant "I am looking forward very much to your new work." Amis also maintained that he threw the bottle of wine on the floor "in an attempt to disable the large number of green phosphorescent serpents I had seen writhing there."

Much of this trauma is reflected in *Women I Bloody Hate Them*, which, while no less funny than its predecessor *I Want A Shag*, is a more challenging work. Several critics have detected an autobiographical element in this story of a serial adulterer with a drink problem who... [*continues for thousands of pages*]

Books & Bookmen

■ WITH *North Face of Soho*, the fourth volume of his memoirs, fans of Clive James again have the chance to marvel at their hero's achievements – discovering Martin Amis, being praised by Ken Tynan, penning the most brilliant TV column in the history of western civilisation, and so on.

One of the most striking episodes is his account of meeting the Sex Pistols at the Granada television studios on the day of their notorious "dirty old fucker" interview with Bill Grundy, in December 1976. As Clive tells it, Sid Vicious accosted him in the green room, snarled "What are you looking at?" and implicitly threatened him with a beating.

Most exciting – but alas untrue, as Vicious didn't join the band until 1977. If there ever was such an encounter it must have been with Vicious's predecessor, the less famous Glen Matlock. But of course that would rather spoil the story of a historic encounter between two great icons of popular culture.

■ AS A member of 1960s pop group Love Affair, Lynton Guest had a hit with the single "Everlasting Love". Many years later, as a freelance writer, he interviewed O J Simpson for the *Sunday Telegraph* – only to have the piece spiked by editor Dominic Lawson.

Now Guest has seized the chance to avenge himself. "My greatest scoop was scuppered," he writes in his new book, *The Trials of Michael Jackson*. "The fact that Lawson was summarily fired in 2005 by the new owners of the *Telegraph*, the reclusive Barclay brothers, after the shady dealings of the ousted former owner, Conrad Black, were exposed, was of little consolation."

Whoops! Lawson's solicitors have written to the publishers complaining that this wrongly implies some connection between Black's shady dealings and the editor's subsequent dismissal. "Not only is this completely untrue, it is also extremely damaging to our client's personal and professional reputation." Unless the offending passage is withdrawn, writs will fly.

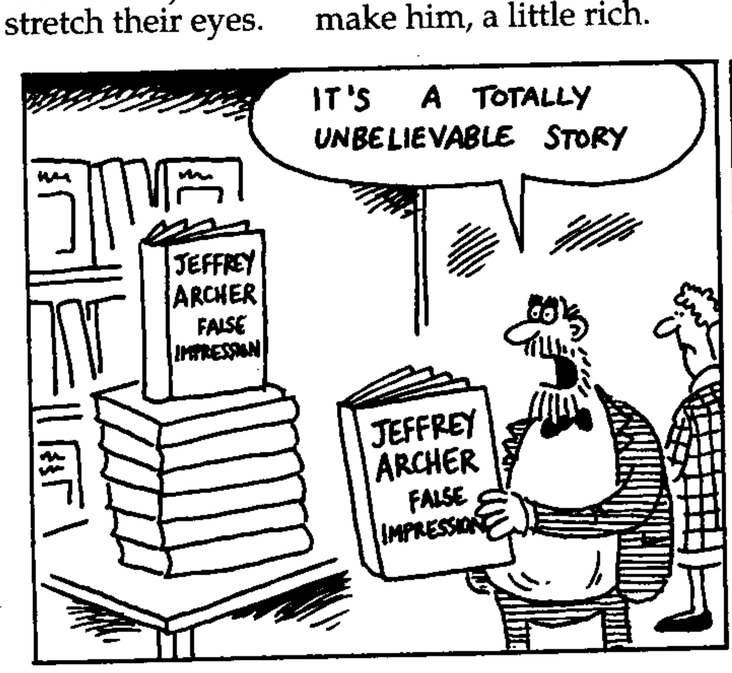
Guest remains defiant. But the reliability of his account may be slightly undermined by another assertion in the book. "Lawson is a member of a very establishment family," he writes, "whose brother and sister are both high-profile media performers. Mark Lawson is a columnist and broadcaster..."

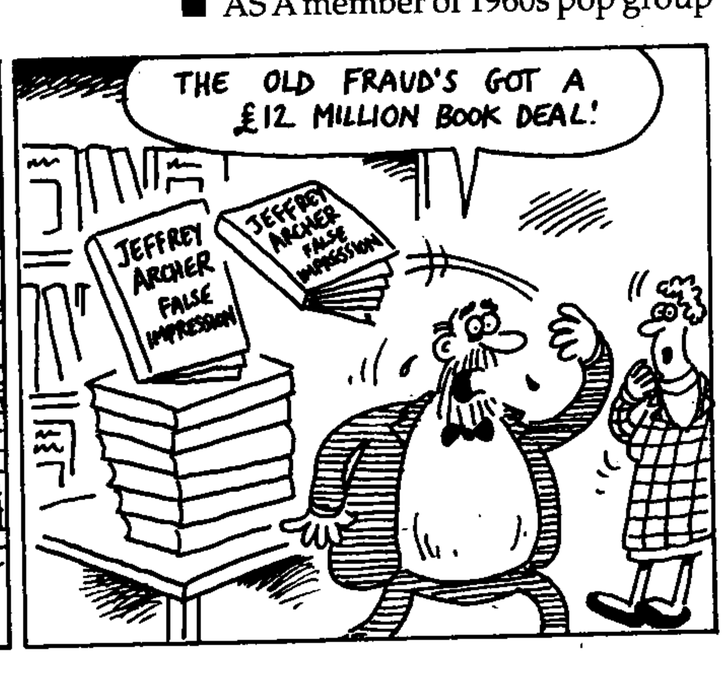
Are Dominic Lawson and Mark Lawson by any chance related? Er, no.

■ THAT Renaissance man George Galloway MP is writing a historical novel about the Communist poet John Cornford.

In an article for the Counterpunch website, he describes

Contines overleaf





Cornford as "part of the golden generation of the British left who went to fight fascism in Spain", and explains that he's writing the book because "their memory has been sullied by Orwell's slanders, unfortunately reinforced by Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom*, and now lies largely forgotten on the Iberian peninsula".

If Ken Loach wishes to reply to this uncomradely slur on his reputation, he'll have plenty of opportunities: he sits on the national council of Galloway's Respect coalition!

Before chiding Loach for historical errors, perhaps the MP should get his own facts right. Galloway writes that Cornford "flared briefly but brilliantly and burnt out in the flash of a fascist musket in a now largely forgotten battle". A musket? In 1936? A century after the invention of the breech-loading rifle?

■ IN a recent post on her blog, author Susan Hill lambasted the broadsheet press for being "largely irrelevant" and "arrogant" when it came to their book review pages. Now she can add "petty" and "vindictive" to that list of traits.

One editor has written to her in response and said that: "No book either published or written by you in future will be reviewed on our Literary Pages." Hill refuses to name and shame the culprit, but it shouldn't be too difficult to work out once her next book is published.

■ HAVING spent a pot of cash and hours of research to come up with its innovative new tagline "What's Your Story?", Waterstone's must be more than a little annoyed to discover that Aldo Shoes uses exactly the same slogan.

Watch out for confused customers asking booksellers if they have Jamie Oliver in a size 8½.

'Bookworm'

Karl barks

The World of Karl Pilkington

Karl Pilkington, Stephen Merchant and Ricky Gervais

(Fourth Estate, £10)

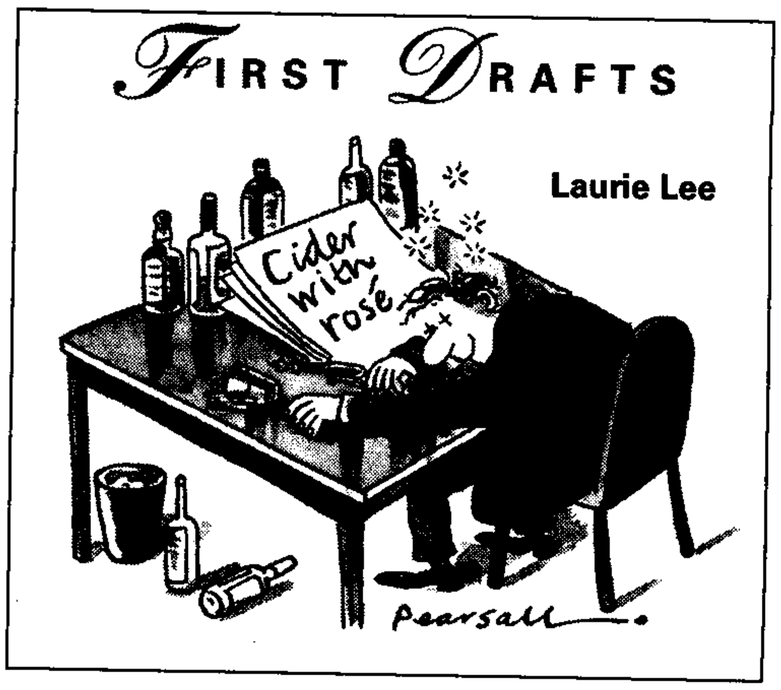
After the success of *The Office* and the fawning that followed, podcasting offered a cheap, instantaneous way for Gervais to deliver his comedic talent to the world untrammelled by studio bosses, exec producers or other meddling moneymen.

He and his writing partner Stephen Merchant determined that they would simply sit down in his Tottenham Court Road office with a microphone and a producer, and gabble for half an hour. The tacit implication that came with each download was that Gervais was so funny that he could prattle on about anything under the sun and it would be hilarious. As it turned out, he didn't even have to do much prattling, because most of the hilarity ended up coming from the producer, Karl Pilkington.

The formula was simple: Gervais or his writing partner Stephen Merchant would tee up Pilkington with a deliberately inane pub-banter question like "What's your favourite insect?" Pilkington would attempt an answer in his drab monotone, rambling on until he said something almost surreally nonsensical ("If you eat seven bananas in a row it will kill you"). At this point Gervais would fall about laughing and call him an idiot. Much of the subject matter – animals, freaks, inventions – and indeed the formula itself was borrowed from Gervais's XFM radio show several years before. But by the time the Pilkington podcasts began, Gervais was the alpha-male of British comedy and his fans would probably have laughed at his dandruff. So the podcasts became extremely popular.

It helped, of course, that *The Ricky Gervais Show* was initially a free download from the *Guardian*'s website, and that that paper marshalled every ounce of its collective journalistic objectivity to plug this modest coup to death. Either way, the podcasts were a cult hit, and Karl Pilkington, the dunderhead, soon became the star turn.

Unfortunately almost everything that made the podcasts funny is lost on the page. Pilkington doesn't do one-liners or wordplay; the humour resides in how his deadpan delivery contrasts with the whirling lunacy of what he's saying. The reader, therefore, has to work extra hard – buying in to the set-up, overlooking the fact that Karl is a successful radio producer who must be play-acting, and laughing as loud as Ricky did in the podcasts. It's a lot to ask.



Them and US

Point to Point Navigation

Gore Vidal

(Little Brown, £17.99)

Sad to relate, British critics' deference to US lit and their inability to distinguish wheat from chaff, should that chaff happen to be blowing across the Montana plains, even extends to that very typical American genre, the ageing literary colossus's fussy memoir. Here, for example, is Gore Vidal breezing into his ninth decade on the planet. Nothing that Gore has been banging on about for the past 20 years is ignored: the disdainful fury about popular culture and its exponents; the reprise of that far-off Senate campaign in 1960 where he got more votes in Upper New York State than Jack Kennedy in the equivalent presidential contest; the modest name-dropping, as when Barbara Cartland turns up for lunch in Bangkok with a Thai princess just after the royal wedding of 1981, allowing Vidal to remember what Princess Margaret said about Babs's absence from the guest-list.

There is, of course, nothing quite like a patrician, smart-ass American liberal in full flow: reading Vidal (who, to do him justice, can be unaffectedly poignant on the subject of his long-term partner's death) one sees *exactly* why Americans vote Republican. Of the many typical sentences in *Point to Point Navigation*, the most typical of all – in that it combines name-dropping with dense webs of family connection – is the one in which Gore's elevation to the American Academy of Arts and Letters is finessed by its president, the novelist Louis Auchincloss ("my onetime cousin due to marriage who ceased to be cousin due to a subsequent divorce and remarriage that provided him with Jackie Kennedy as my replacement").

Art exists for no purpose beyond itself. The first attribute of the art object is that it creates a discontinuity between itself and the unsynthesised manifold.

GERMAINE GREER,
Guardian

"Tamara Drewe" [Posy Simmonds' weekly cartoon soap] is a bravura piece of story-telling, its narrative arc as perfectly composed and realised as a Bach fugue.

RICHARD REES-JONES,
letter to *Guardian Saturday Review*

'...the primary colour stain on the Velcro of elective memory.'

PETER HENNESSY discussing the 50th anniversary of the Suez Crisis,
Today Programme

Pain, embarrassment and sadness are his muses, he says, and his humour derives from worry and fear. His mission is to 'bludgeon ennui', to push the boundaries as far as they can go because he loves extremes. Take a look at his life and you see him acting out these extremes. The day after 9/11 he turned up at MTV where he worked as a presenter, off his head on crack and heroin, dressed as Osama bin Laden.

TARA WINTER WILSON on Russell Brand, ***Daily Telegraph***

Sometimes there can be a kind of euphoria to failure when, on occasion, a catastrophe can be so monumental, so spectacular, that it becomes almost blissful, like sleep deprivation or fasting. It's been so long now since West Ham have enjoyed a victory or even a draw that the failure itself becomes beautiful. When West Ham lost to Chesterfield, the sense of disappointment was so profound, lucid, livid and sharp that it almost plunged through the threshold of failure and attained a Zen-like status of detachment induced by disaster. Why is it that happiness visits so seldom and stays so fleetingly, like an April butterfly alighting momentarily upon your finger...[continues]

RUSSELL BRAND,
Guardian

And then there are the flawed heroes. The ones who have to struggle, fight and occasionally fail. The ones whose triumphs are always unexpected and against the odds. Those are the ones that sports fans can care about, identify with and celebrate. Those are the ones who are remembered for ever. This second class of heroes are vulnerable. That is why we love them. We suffer with them, we celebrate with them. And when they die, we die with them.

PETER OBORNE on Desert Orchid,
Daily Mail

The difference about my furniture is that it's always trying to translate an emotional idea – always trying to capture the essence of a style in a coherent design that says something I want to say. Put simply, furniture is my way of speaking, a natural form of expression.

MARK WILKINSON, mission statement

CONTRIBUTORS: Dave Taylor, Brian Leedham, David Nicholls, Will Macdougall, Alex Wilde, Strobes, Dom Hughes.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY

Good riddance

CONFIRMATION in the Queen's Speech that the disastrous Child Support Agency is to be scrapped gives no comfort to all those who have battled in vain with the agency for support and are still waiting for results.

Mother of three Sharon Johnson, 38, has been trying since 2003 to get the CSA to obtain regular financial support for her children from her ex-husband. Although he made payments on an ad-hoc basis for some time, by the end of 2005 he had stopped paying and Mrs Johnson, struggling to make ends meet, applied to the CSA again.

Back came a letter to her new Buckingham address. It was addressed to her ex-husband who had never lived there. What's more, it didn't even concern her case but contained a completely separate CSA claim against her ex-husband.

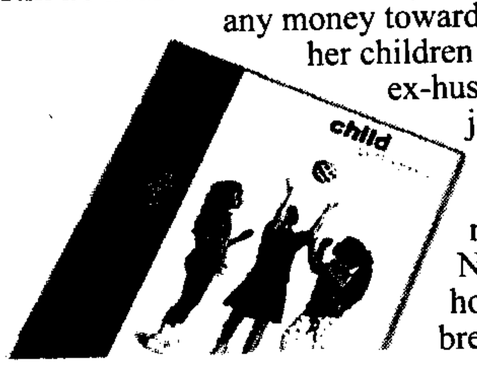
When Mrs Johnson's complaint fell on deaf ears, her MP, John Bercow, took up the matter with the chief executive of the CSA. He was assured that although nothing had happened on Sharon's case in the previous four months, she would now be assigned a caseworker and an assessment would be made within four weeks.

That was in March, since when her case has not progressed one jot.

Like so many other CSA cases the *Eye* has recorded, Mrs Johnson's kept "disappearing" from the computer system. People supposed to be dealing with the issue went on holiday. When a detailed assessment was finally sent to Mrs Johnson in July, the information in it was wrong.

In recognition of the delay and shoddy treatment, the CSA sent Mrs Johnson a derisory £50 by way of consolation. That was in August – and it didn't exactly pay off many debts. Eventually the CSA told Mr Bercow's office that it would take her case out of the system to be dealt with on paper by an individual clerk. Alas, such work was being subcontracted to a new private outfit in Bolton and could not be looked at until the end of September. But it then get the "highest priority". Honest.

It is now November and, amid rumours that the Bolton office is in meltdown, Mrs Johnson is still no nearer than she was a year ago to receiving any money towards the care of her children from her ex-husband. She has just been told her case is being handled by a new department. No, she isn't holding her breath.

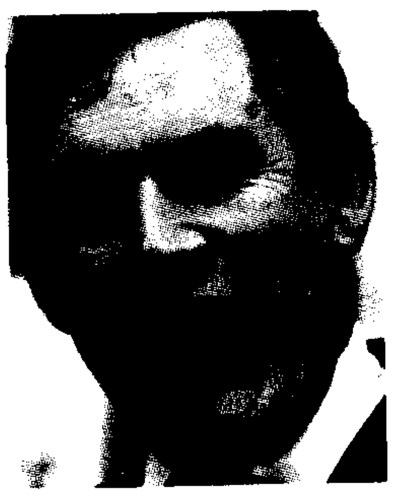


THIRD WORLD VACCINATION

Cash injection for the banks

GORDON BROWN was on a divine mission when he launched the International Finance Facility for Immunisation (IFFIm), an investment bond which aims to pay for the vaccination of children in some of the world's poorest countries.

"Recognising the combination of strong moral purpose and the power to raise finance, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi, the Muslim Council of Britain, the Hindu Forum of Britain and the Network of Sikh Organisations have agreed to buy the first six IFFIm bonds," he declared. With representatives of all these in attendance, including the Archbish himself, nobody dared mention filthy lucre – but there's plenty of that in the deal.



IFFIm will issue bonds, repayable from future aid budgets, to pay for immediate immunisation programmes in the third world. With cast-iron government guarantees and a high rate of interest (a bit like PFI, it's more expensive than government borrowing but flatters the figures), the bonds were inevitably over-subscribed – giving the bankers the easiest day's work they'll ever have and plenty of reflected virtue.

"Deutsche Bank is honoured to support IFFIm in its campaign to [immunise] the world's less-advantaged children," boasted the bank. "The success of the facility's debut bond issue is an endorsement… of private sector capital in development issues." The World Bank (manager for the bonds) was equally keen to point out that Goldman Sachs had been "financial advisor, on a *pro bono* basis".

So a rare act of charity from the bankers? Not exactly.

The *Eye* discovered that they had received their standard fee of 0.1 percent for placing the bonds. On the first $1bn batch that means they shared $1m for what in investment banking terms was a piece of cake. And there's another $3m to come when the rest of the bonds are issued. IFFIm chairman Alan Gillespie (also boss of Ulster Bank) maintained that the usual fee was required to hold the banks accountable and that "IFFIm operates as a commercial entity".

Along with Deutsche and Goldman, the even more commercial banks that are now $1m richer courtesy of Gordon's scheme are: Barclays, BNP Paribas, Citigroup, Dresdner, HSBC, JP Morgan, Morgan Stanley and UBS.

CRIMINAL INJURIES

Waiting game

THE Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) has rightly been criticised for delay in compensating victims of the 7/7 bombings. But what of the other 72,438 victims of violent crime and their families who are languishing on the authority's waiting list?

Many have suffered equally devastating injuries yet are waiting even longer – some for more than four years, without even an interim payment.

They include, for example, a boy, now aged six, who suffered brain damage as a baby after he was attacked by one of his parents. An application for compensation was made as long ago as October 2002 on behalf of his adoptive family who provide round-the-clock care. But the CICA still hasn't agreed the tariff – the general award – let alone any special damages to which the boy is entitled because of the severity of his injuries.

Also on the waiting list is a man in his early 20s who was randomly punched in the street by a drunken stranger. He fell and cracked his skull on a kerb, suffering severe brain injuries. He has since developed epilepsy and related liver problems. Unable to concentrate sufficiently to cross a road safely, he requires constant supervision and will never work again. His parents, who devote much time to looking after him, submitted a claim in February 2003 but so far have received nothing to help provide for their son's huge needs.

Perhaps to head off complaints about delays in less publicized cases, the CICA has recently written to everyone on its waiting list to reassure them that their cases had not been "disadvantaged" by any priority being given to the London bomb victims.

In an attempt to explain why 7/7 victims and their families received compensation ahead of many who have been waiting far longer, the CICA claimed that delay was often caused by police forces gathering information from their records. In the case of 7/7, it suggested that as the CICA was dealing with an "identified group of police officers", they were able to prioritise CICA requests for information. Neither did the CICA need to get the nature and detail of the crime in each case.

However, the CICA letter also revealed that it had set up a separate incident team to deal solely with 7/7 claims and that extra funds had been made available to recruit staff to work on the special incident team. This may be welcome news, but it is no consolation to other victims who had borne the brunt of cuts and efficiency savings imposed on the CICA until it was shamed by the collective voice of the London bomb victims.

QUANGOS

A nightmare on Prezza Street

WHEN John Prescott published his white paper setting out plans for regional devolution in 2002, he told reporters it was "the conclusion of a political dream I have held for decades".

Today, however, with Prezza humiliated by the "no" vote on a north-east regional assembly, stripped of departmental responsibility and a laughing stock over his penchant for extra-curricular hanky-panky, his regional dream has acquired a dystopian edge.

This is felt by none more keenly than Claudio Coppola and Linda Edwards, the latest victims of one of Prescott's quangos. The couple, who live in an elegantly-maintained Victorian house in Goole, East Yorkshire, first noticed that something was up when regional development agency Yorkshire Forward's plans for the "regeneration" of their area came through their door. On the map, where their house should be, stood… a warehouse. When the couple protested they were told: "Sell to us, or you'll be surrounded by noise and pollution for the rest of your lives."

While Coppola and Edwards stood their ground, Yorkshire Forward pressed on – with limited success. For three years after YF bought the 250-acre site in 1999 it found that no business was actually interested in using it. Finally in 2002, 50 acres were purchased by Michigan-based glass makers Guardian Industries. They were persuaded to set up in Goole with the sweetener of a £7.6m hand-out from the DTI and Yorkshire Forward towards construction costs.

YF justified this huge investment of taxpayers' money by claiming the site would employ 300 workers. According to Guardian's 2005 accounts, however, the company only has 153 workers in the UK. Put another way, the taxpayer has paid Guardian £50,000 for each worker it employs in the UK.

Seven years after the site was first earmarked, 200 acres of land remain unused. It may well remain so. It has emerged that it lies on a flood plain, which has put the kibosh on attempts to persuade Tesco to site a distribution centre there.

Coppola and Edwards, meanwhile, are staying put – and getting used to life next door to an unwanted glass factory. Nice work, Prezza!

continued overleaf ➤

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

Still doing time

TWO years ago the *Eye* reported how the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) had agreed to expedite its investigation into the country's oldest miscarriage of justice case – the 1967 "one-armed bandit murder", a gangland killing which was the inspiration for the gangster film, *Get Carter*.

The reason for speeding things up was the ill-health of Michael Luvaglio, one of the two men who have always protested their innocence of the execution-style shooting of Angus Sibbett, found dead in the back of his Jaguar car. Luvaglio, 69, was convicted with playboy crook Dennis Stafford, of shooting Sibbett, who worked for Luvaglio's brother, Vince Landa.

There has long been concern over the prosecution – not least that a taxi driver had come forward to say he drove the real killer away from the scene of the crime back to Newcastle. Yet two appeals highlighting many flaws in the case failed. The hope was that yet more new evidence – including more than 100 statements, many of which undermine the prosecution case but were not disclosed at the time – would persuade the CCRC to send the case back to the appeal judges a third time.

With all the new material before it, few doubt that the men's convictions would finally be quashed.

But last week Luvaglio, who has been freed from jail and is now a charity worker, wrote to the *Eye* from hospital to say he had suffered a second heart attack and his prognosis was not good. "I do not want to die a legally convicted murderer," he said urging us to contact the CCRC to ask why it was taking so long.

A spokesman said: "We are aware of the health issues and are, of course, dealing with this as quickly as we can. We have written to Mr Luvaglio very recently to explain that we are in the final stages of the review. The case review process is inherently difficult to predict as committees may meet and decide more work needs to be done before we can make a decision. That said, we expect to be able to make a decision in the near future on this one.

"The majority of cases are decided within 12 months of arriving here. Those complex and more time-consuming ones such as Stafford and Luvaglio are the exception. As the backstop of the justice system, we have to get it right and unfortunately, that means it can take time."

Time the ailing Mr Luvaglio may not have.

SOUTHPORT SEAFRONT

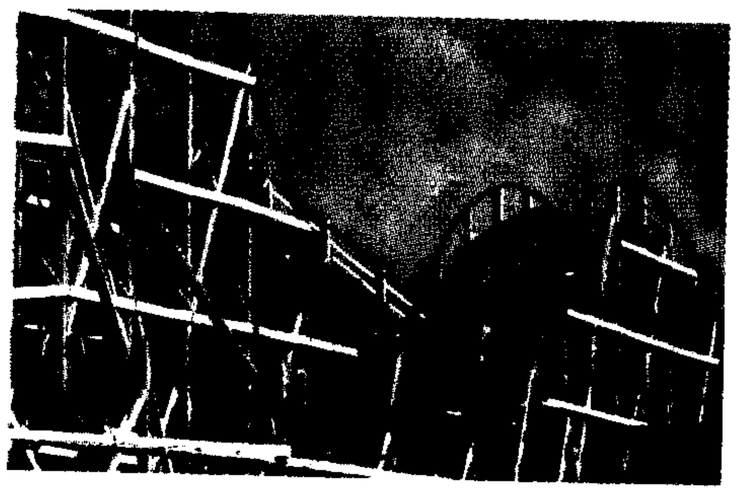
Unfair ground

SO FAREWELL then to Southport Pleasureland, which closed this autumn after the introduction of an entry charge in 2005 saw annual visitors fall from 2.1m to 500,000.

Fairground fans have cried conspiracy, with many believing that the decline and sudden closure of 84-year-old Pleasureland has been deliberate – and certainly little effort has been made to preserve it. Sefton Council, which owns the site and leased it to the fair, isn't looking for a buyer to take on the fair as a going concern, but wants future use to "complement" its other seafront developments. The council has grand plans to market Southport as a classy upmarket resort. Meanwhile the fair's owner, Blackpool Pleasurebeach (BPB), also runs the rival attraction up the coast.

While newer attractions are being moved to Blackpool, the greatest local upset has been over the wooden rollercoaster Cyclone, which has been part of the Southport skyline since 1937. Just days after the fairground closed in September, men with chainsaws were seen on the Cyclone, cutting the tracks, although most of the rollercoaster has not yet been demolished.

However the chainsawing served to wreck an attempt by campaigners to get the ride listed building status. English Heritage was refused access to the site by BPB, but compiled a report anyway, concluding that although the Cyclone is one of only nine historic rollercoasters surviving in Britain, "ongoing demolition since closure in



early September 2006 has seen much of the south east end of the rollercoaster demolished and this continuing demolition, along with the rebuilding of the station and part of the structure, means that a listing recommendation cannot be justified for this rollercoaster."

No plan for the 30-acre council-owned site has been announced yet, but Sefton has already been busy developing the rest of the sea front with plans for a £30m hotel complex and "Dunes Splash World", an indoor water park. These will join the cinema, bowling alley, pet food superstore and Matalan already developed on the seafront.

● Detailed plans for the future of the Margate Dreamland fun park site are to be unveiled in the new year. The site was bought last year by Margate Town Centre Regeneration Company, part of developers Waterbridge, who have previously said they want to develop: "a fantastic mix of leisure, restaurants, retail and accommodation" there. Several public consultations have called for the amusement park to be retained on the site.

OBESITY

Junk strategy

MORE on the Freedom of Information papers that show health minister Caroline Flint is in bed with the junk food industry as she leads the battle against obesity.

Flint has taken industry stalwarts on to her "high-powered nutrition strategy steering group", launched with the Food Standards Agency last month. Members include Salman Amin, the head of PepsiCo in the UK; Gavin Neath of Unilever, manufacturer of Cornetto and Magnum ice cream; and Paul Kelly, boss of the "Turkey Twizzlers" caterer Compass. There's even room for David Reid, chair of Tesco, the firm that rejected the government's "traffic light" labeling scheme to mark out unhealthy foods; Sainsbury's chief executive Justin King and Steve Esom of Waitrose.

Meanwhile briefing papers from Flint's introductory meetings last year with Kellogg's, Asda, Nestlé and Cadbury when she started her job show much praise for the industry and only a little finger-wagging (see last *Eye*). But how tough can the minister be when these purveyors of junk food are the very allies she hopes will deliver her obesity "social marketing" campaign – telling people to eat healthily and exercise. Kellogg's and Asda have jumped at the chance to tell consumers how much exercise they must do to work off the calories they've just consumed. Ministers are unlikely to press food retailers and manufacturers that do the government's work for it.

JUDICIAL COMPLAINTS

Oh brother

SO Mr Justice Collins has been cleared of wrongdoing in presiding over the judicial review case involving the General Medical Council and Chai "Diddums" Patel, the man behind the Priory group of health and rehabilitation clinics (see *Eyes passim*).

Complaints were made after the *Eye* disclosed that Mr Justice Collins' brother, Dr Mark Collins, is the Priory-based consultant psychiatrist to the stars. The suggestion was that the high court judge should have excused himself from the case because of his brother's links to Labour's favourite health guru and benefactor.

However, the Office for Judicial Complaints (OJC) has just declared the complaints "unsubstantiated". Lord Falconer, the Lord Chancellor, and Lord Phillips, the Lord Chief Justice, were satisfied with Mr Justice Collins' assurance "that while he could not be completely sure, he did not believe that he made the connection between his brother and Dr Patel" when he heard the case in February 2005.

The Priory Group boss had been facing GMC proceedings relating to allegations about neglect and ill treatment at Lynde House, a west London care home run by what was then Patel's Westminster Care Homes. It was the first test of whether a doctor should be disciplined over the care of patients whom he was not directly treating.

Much to the distress of families who had had relatives at Lynde House, the GMC dropped the case before any evidence was heard. Mr Justice Collins had declared the regulatory body's charges a "rotten indictment" which looked like it was scapegoating Dr Patel.

It was not until earlier this year, when Mr Justice Collins declined an invitation from lawyers to excuse himself from sitting on another GMC case, involving paediatrician Professor Sir Roy Meadow, that the families became aware of the judge's brother and the latter's links to Dr Diddums.

In the Meadow case, lawyers for the GMC had asked Mr Justice Collins not to sit because the GMC had itself sat in judgment on his brother, Dr Mark Collins, over allegations of sexual impropriety with a vulnerable female patient. While the GMC cleared Dr Collins of serious professional misconduct and found the sexual allegations unproven, it did criticise him for crossing patient-doctor boundaries by meeting the patient outside work and "allowing his head to be turned" by a pretty patient. The GMC lawyers also pointed out that the barrister representing Mr Justic Collins' brother, Nicola Davies QC, was also representing Sir Roy.

Mr Justice Collins could see no potential conflict resulting from the GMC case involving his brother and said he did not know Ms Davies. He then went on to deliver a judgment which not only limited the powers of the GMC to regulate doctors who give inaccurate and misleading evidence to courts, but also gave greater protection from sanction for any old "expert" who gives evidence, no matter how dodgy. That highly contentious part of Collins' ruling was recently overturned by judges in the court of appeal, who said the judge had made an "unprincipled" extension of the common law. The appeal court decision in October cleared the way for the doctors' regulator to resume several outstanding disciplinary cases.

In setting out its reasons for rejecting the complaints from the Lynde House families about Mr Justice Collins, the Office for Judicial Complaints says that before deciding not to excuse himself from the Meadow case, he had sought advice from the Lord Chief Justice - who of course was one of the key judges considering the complaint.

The Lynde House families now intend to raise the matter with the Judicial Appointments and Conduct Ombudsman. But as he only has powers to consider how a complaint was handled – not the complaint itself – they are not optimistic.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE taxman's new found determination to query the real non-residence or new domicile of those who move abroad but continue to operate in the UK is likely to perturb more than a few high profile, not so long distance British commuters from the more beneficial tax regimes of the Channel islands, Isle of Man, Monaco, Belgium, Gibraltar and Switzerland.

The Revenue's aim seems to be to crack down on those who it sees are abusing the system by seeking to work in Britain Monday to Thursday while claiming to live abroad rather than those who have moved abroad and return for leisure rather than loot.

One such possible target, who had already got the Revenue's attention before last week's bombshell ruling, severely limiting the number of days a non-resident can spend in the UK and avoid tax, is understood to have been the late and very rich Stephen Curtis - lawyer of choice for a number of Russian oligarchs in exile and their associates.

"You get this sort of rubbish coming through from the UK all the time now"

Curtis had moved his notional residence to a hotel penthouse in Gibraltar at the time of his mysterious death by helicopter crash in March 2004. However, he continued to commute to his castle home in Dorset, where his family lived, and his offices in Park Lane on a very regular basis.

The presumed aim of the Gibraltar move was to establish first non-UK residence and ultimately non-UK domicile thereby avoiding/reducing first income and capital gains tax and more importantly inheritance tax. Curtis suffered from leukemia which made a long life unlikely so estate planning was more necessary than usual for a man who was only 45 when he died. Non-residents only pay UK tax on their UK received income or owned assets. Non-domicile and resident status avoids 40 percent UK inheritance tax

The Revenue is understood to have begun inquiries into Curtis's claimed non-residence and planned new domicile before or soon after his death. They were seemingly suspicious of just how much time he was really in Gibraltar as distinct from the UK. After three years abroad it is possible to establish a new deemed domicile as well as non-residency. Non-residents are supposed to spend a maximum of 90 days in the UK. Unless non-domicile is established, then that 90-day test becomes all important.

That calculation regarding Curtis could have expensive consequences for his multi-million pound estate if the Revenue were to claim he died before the Gibraltar move was effective (especially as his funeral was in Dorset) and/or that he was in the UK for more than 90 days and so remained resident here. Curtis' fortune is put in high two-figure millions. There has been no news so far about what was left to who indicating that the probate process has not been completed.

The recent bombshell ruling by the special commissioners against businessman Robert Gaines-Cooper, who claimed to be resident in the Seychelles, has similarities to the Curtis position. Gaines-Cooper's family lived in Britain while he travelled the world. The ruling that Gaines-Cooper was resident and still domiciled because he visited Britain so often and had not severed all his ties with his domicile of origin will be fiercely contested, probably all the way to the law lords and so a definitive ruling may take until 2008.

Meanwhile there could be substantial tax issues for the Curtis estate even if, as was the case, many of his assets were held by offshore trusts and companies mostly run out of Gibraltar and there were one or more UK and offshore wills. Tax experts wonder whether there could be a long legal battle similar to that fought and lost by the estate of 60s tycoon Charles Clore who thought he had moved to Switzerland.

Tax advisers expect that those who regularly commute from their offshore or continental homes to London Monday through Thursday will in future have to pay more careful attendance to recording the exact details of their trips. It is for them to prove they were not in the UK, not for the Revenue to prove that they were.

For many years and in accordance with Revenue guidelines, such best of both worlds commuting was in theory possible without jeopardizing non-residence status because the 90 days in the UK in any one year rule had been translated as meaning no more than 90 nights. The reason being that the days of travel into and out of the UK were not counted. That created effectively 270 out of 365 days on which the non-resident could be in the country taking care of business or having fun. And even that was made further elastic for those traveling from and to EU countries with no passport checks. Curtis was reportedly on his way from a day of meetings in London to Dublin on the day he died.

This is why – especially since the rule requiring non-resident Brits not to have a home in the UK available for their use was dropped in the 1980s – it has been so easy for those who made a big score, such as from selling a business, to move abroad to avoid capital gains tax but still continue to return regularly and even run a new business here. Most tax advisers did not suggest such a tactic in the first year after cashing in but there was no need to stay away for the full five years – increased by Labour from three.

Some well known Monaco residents, such as the great retailer Sir Philip Green who are directors of UK companies, have become UK resident for their UK employment income. So they can arrive on Monday and leave on Friday with no problem. But that still leaves offshore assets UK tax free – in Green's case because they are controlled by his non-domiciled wife Tina's family trusts. Interestingly, Curtis' Pennsylvania Castle was bought in his wife's name.

But a strict enforcement of the 90-day rule might even cause headaches for non-resident peers and businessmen such as Lords Ashcroft and Laidlaw although both have been living abroad – Belize, Florida, Monaco – for many years before returning to the UK pick up their peerages after a lifetime of Tory party donations. But then no one could suggest they would ever break the residency rules.

What will be the outcome regarding Stephen Curtis remains to be seen. Much may depend on the final legal ruling in the case of the far less renowned Robert Gaines-Cooper.

GOOD to see that the London Stock Exchange and the Lord Mayor of London welcoming in grand style this week Kazakhstan's kleptocratic president Nursultan Nazarbayev – long time ruler of Borat's homeland. But then that is only fair given the big fees generated for City banks and brokers by the stream of once state-owned Kazakh company listings which have raised more than £2bn.

Meanwhile over in New York the trial is awaited next February of Nazarbayev's bagman James Giffen who paid some $60m from foreign oil companies into Swiss bank accounts linked to the president and his family. Nazarbayev claims the money belongs to the state. The much embarrassed US government is appealing a ruling that would force disclosure of classified documents regarding Giffen's dealings with the White House plus American diplomats and spooks and their knowledge of Nazarbayev's corruption.

Giffen's case is that he was doing Uncle Sam's bidding. If prosecutors lose then the US's main Central Asian ally could be in for some extremely bad publicity unless Giffen is given a no-jail time deal. Needless to say such matters will not be raised during Nazarbayev's visit to a grateful City.

THE Labour Party insists that its £12m in loans from would-be peers did not have to be disclosed because they were on commercial terms at 2 percent over base rate or 6.5 percent. This, however, looks decidedly uncommercial when compared with the rates charged the party for its own borrowing by the Co-operative Bank. It was charging around 7 percent for secured mortgage lending covering the party's new London offices. The donor loans were unsecured!

Most banking experts suggest the real commercial rate was 4 percent over base or nearer 8.5 percent. No doubt Yates of the Yard will want

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to know which financial expert decreed that 6.5 percent was commercial and so non-disclosable to the Electoral Commission.

ONCE again the onions are being brought out to generate sympathy for an "elderly couple" suffering from "ill health" who face extradition to the United States under the draconian Anglo-American treaty, much criticized as one-sided. Stanley and Beatrice Tollman at 75 and 73 might seem deserving of sympathy but only to those who don't know Stanley Tollman, a one-time Chelsea director and long-time South African associate of former Chelsea chairman Ken Bates.

Hotelier Tollman fled from the US in 2002 ahead of his indictment on $42m bank fraud charges. He was later charged with hiding $30m from the US taxman. Tollman and four associates were accused of hiding millions in income offshore obtained when they conned banks into writing off loans to the Tollman-Hundley group which at one time owned a large chain of Days Inn motels across America. Tollman and Hundley pleaded poverty to persuade the banks to sell their $50m in loans for $7.5m. They sold the hotels for $100m.

The discounted loans were sold to supposed European investors. In fact the buyers were companies controlled by Tollman and Hundley. One was called Chelsea Acquisitions. Bates, who now controls Leeds Utd, gave evidence at Hundley's trial about his limited knowledge of and involvement with that company but was not accused of any wrongdoing.

Hundley and three others were convicted in 2004 and jailed – Hundley for eight years. At first US prosecutors hoped to either persuade Tollman to cut a deal and return or to be extradited from his apartment overlooking Buckingham Palace. But Tollman had no intention of doing any time so there was no deal. The Tollmans control three London hotels including the Chesterfield and Milestone.

Tollman persisted in this tactic even when the Feds indicted first his son (for tax fraud) and then his wife (tax fraud) as a hardball way to make him change his mind. Many believed that if Tollman had gone back to the US and faced trial there would have been no prosecution of his wife and son. But Stanley stayed put in London and watched his son Brett plead guilty and go to jail for 33 months in 2004. His wife was charged the same day and is now also a fugitive.

Prosecutors further ratcheted up the pressure by indicting Tollman's nephew Gavin who was arrested at Toronto airport in 2005 after flying in from London but released last September after a Canadian judge denounced the US tactics as an abuse of process. A fellow director, New Zealander Richard Masefield, was less fortunate. Masefield was extradited from Australia and pleaded guilty. He was jailed last year.

Masefield, like the Tollmans, was accused of receiving secret US tax free payments from accounts at the Royal Bank of Canada in Guernsey. These arrangewments had been administered by a management company linked to another former Chelsea director, Patrick Murrin, who was not accused of any wrongdoing.

Lawyers in Britain may feel uncomfortable with the US tactics in the Tollman case but what cannot be denied in this instance is that there is a case for him to answer. Which may explain why he stayed here while his son went to jail.

'Slicker'

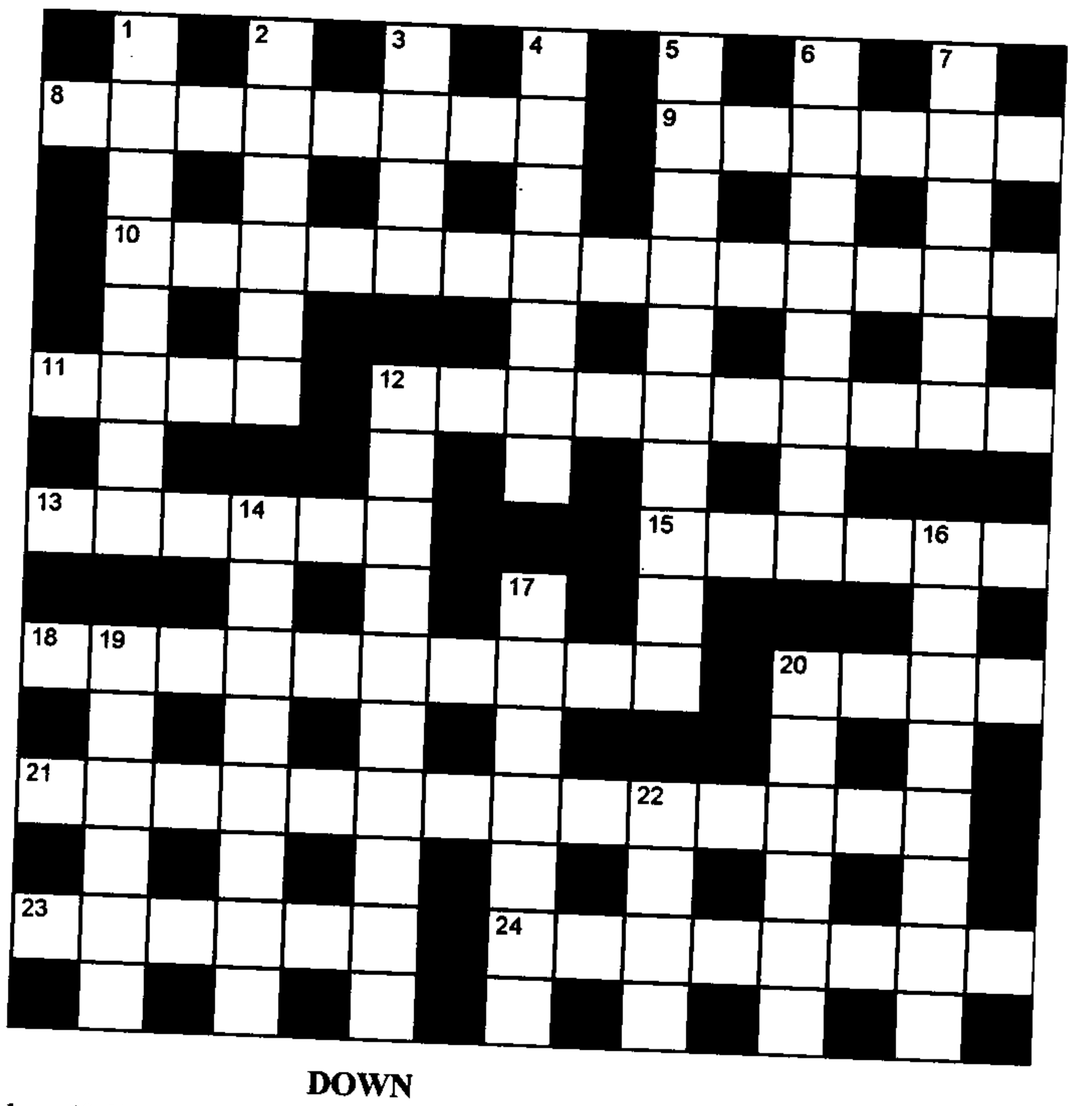
Numbercrunchings

£24m ■ Extra cash First Direct bank plans to raise every year by charging poorer customers £10 a month for current accounts

£28m ■ Earnings of directors of First Direct's parent, HSBC, last year

EYE CROSSWORD 327

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 1 December 2006

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

8 Queer circle at university get lost (5,3)

9 Windy type, one into kinky boots (6)

10 Foreign bodies increasingly found in British bathrooms? (6,8)

11 Good to get away from Glenda's coarse material (4)

12 A dick's an amusing and informative organ! (7,3)

13 Is able to go arse over tip after cold drink (6)

15 Slight tossing until grabbing Sonya's top (6)

18 Removing the nuts from actors group, before making judgement (10)

20 The party of Blair, 'Right' rather than 'New' (4)

21 An annoying thing that's said to make you glass-bottomed? (1,4,2,3,4)

23 Straw poll's last to include one – that's a beast (6)

24 Iron skirt to get a good bloke? Not she! (8)

DOWN

1 Bill gets Paul awfully firm in Mexico (8)

2 Shagged-out feeling of high-flier let loose in fast car? (6)

3 Our mag's reported pros (4)

4 Provincial arse turned pink (7)

5 Stuffing rounded plug in coat (10)

6 The last men's bollocks (8)

7 What fags might end up in – not hard to get off the straight and narrow (6)

12 Worsted clad police – not such a bad thing (10)

14 Finds small faults in grooms like apes? (8)

16 Charity's crap legs and arse (8)

17 Curtailed prison sentence given to Archer type when the rocket goes up? (4-3)

19 Claim climber's into lap dancing (6)

20 Empty Tory bluster from a bullying leader (6)

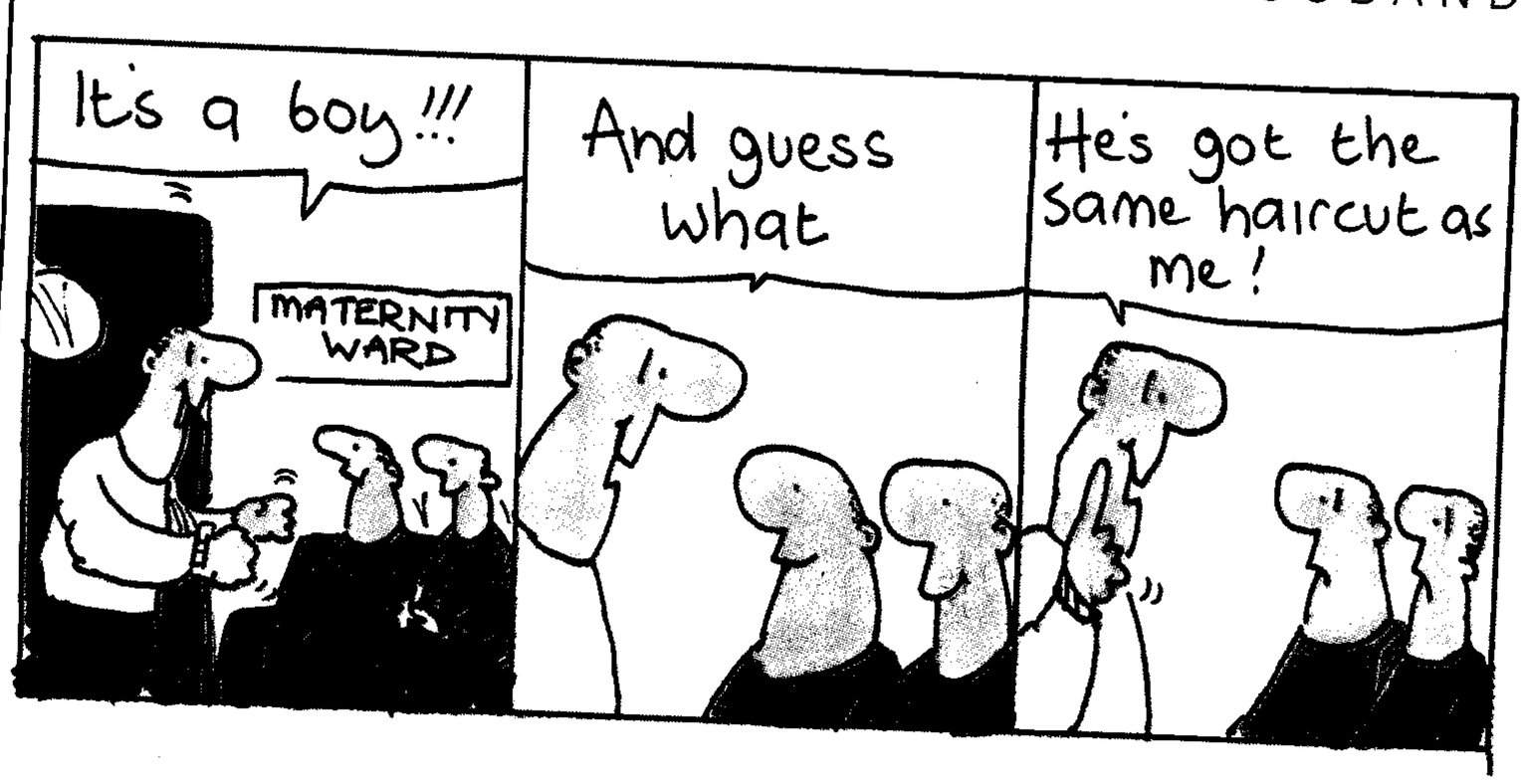
22 Something with which to break into (being topless) showbiz award (4)

Crossword 326 winner: DAVID DURRANCE

ACROSS: 1 Magnetic 6 Sussed 9 Grim Reaper 10 Oath 11 Chin up 12 Cop a feel 13 Upmarket 15 Aristo 17 Studio 19 Scottish 21 Slovakia 23 Gaelic 24 Obit 25 Driveshaft 26 Entrap 27 Genitals.

DOWN: 2 Airship 3/19 Naming and shaming 4 Twerp 5 Copycat 6 Strappado 7 Spoof 8 Entreat 14 Knocked up 16 In the shit 18 Taliban 20 Skinful 22 Voter 23 Glean.

HUSBAND



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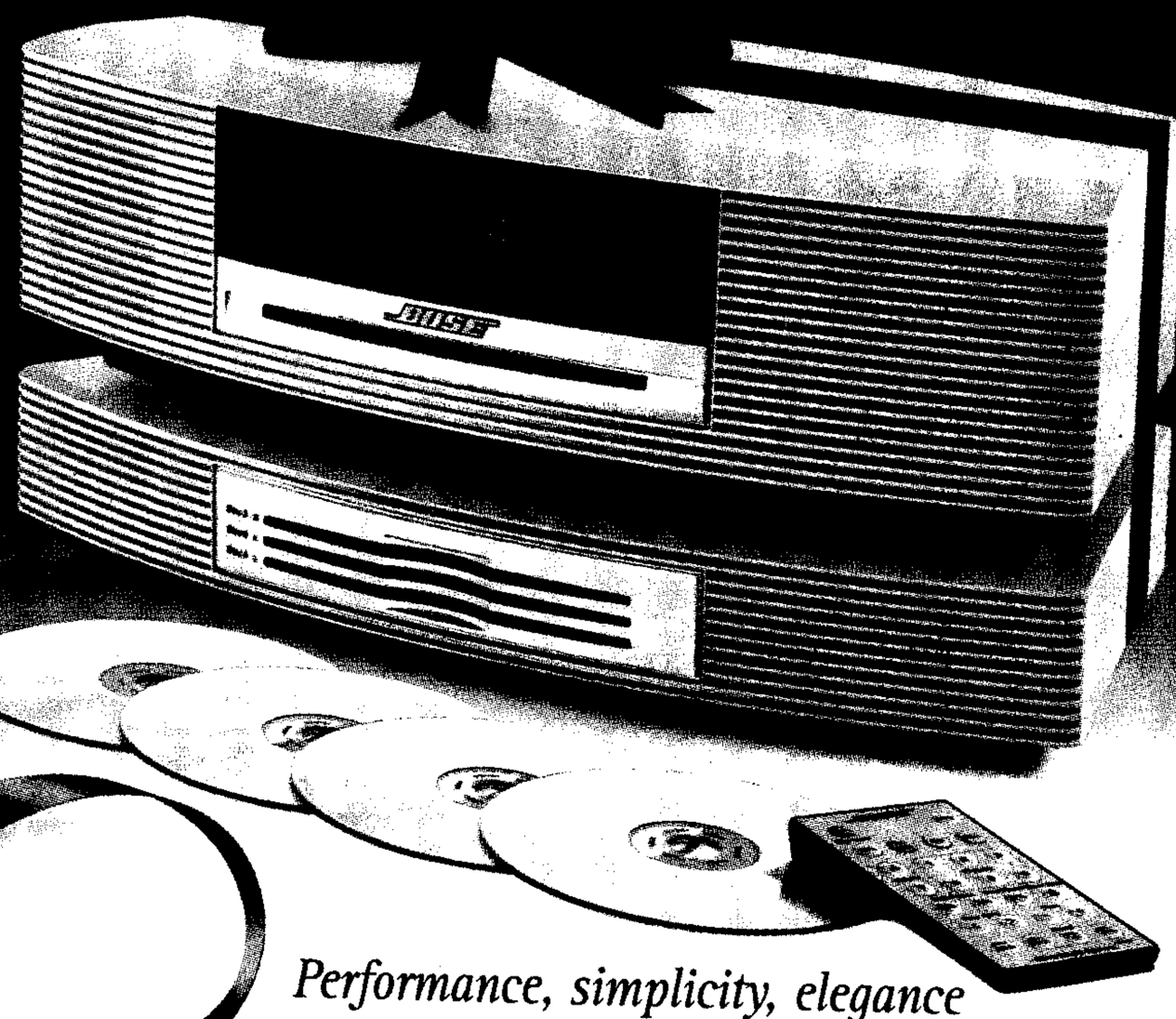

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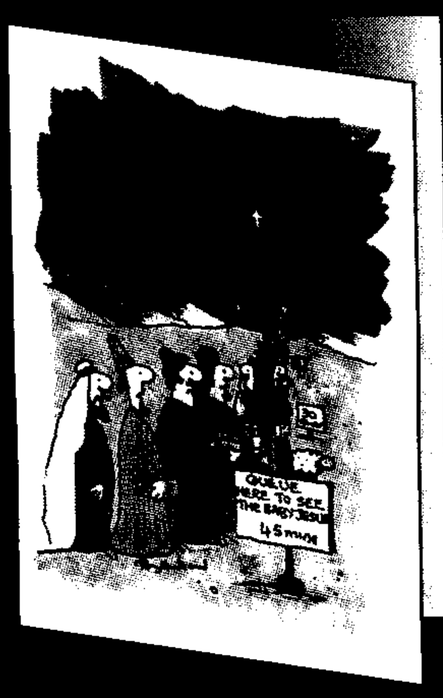

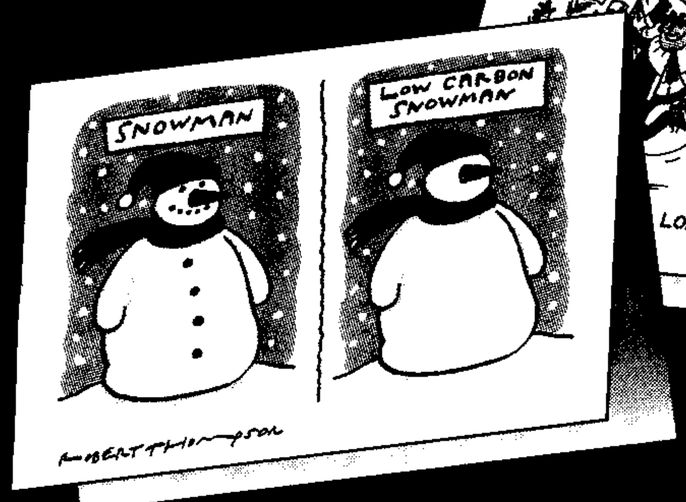

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DESTITUTE MULTI-ART FORM environmental artist: Benefactress died (Miriam Rothschild), now homeless. Need 4/5 bed house with garden near East Oxford for low rent. Cambridge graduate, doctorate, with young family. Reply Box 179789.

STRUGGLING ARTIST seeks financial help to ward off demons of corporate hell. S/C: 30-93-34. A/C: 02675958.

WANT TO APPEAR IN A NOVEL? About to be a household name author – need some patronage to get me through. householdnameauthor@hotmail.com S/C: 30-25-80. A/C: 14798168.

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RECENTLY have come out of abusive marriage of 11 years. Need to rebuild life. Struggling with two young kids. S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 84545830.

DENTAL PROBLEM. Unable to smile. Need £2400 please. S/C: 20-92-60. A/C: 270091618.

DISABLED EMPLOYEE, large financial institution; needs funds to pay for action for discrimination. S/C: 11-47-90. A/C: 00030626.

SEVEN INDIVIDUALS bringing case in Europe to win right not to pay for war. Committed to £60K legal fees. Please help. HSBC, S/C: 40-19-16. A/C: 31357190. Info: www.peacetaxseven.com

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COMPOSER needs quiet house for six months anywhere EU. Can pay bills / do jobs. Refs supplied. Peri_lykiardopoulos@yahoo.co.uk

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NOVELIST completing first draft, but debts piling! Massive thanks if you can help. S/C: 10-80-02. A/C: 60678752.

DEPRESSED PHILOSOPHY STUDENT needs help: Cigarettes and poetry not helping. Need £400 for eight EMDR sessions to let go of pain and open up. S/C: 40-01-21. A/C: 11409808.

CONT SPELL, NEED HELP. HSBC, S/C: 40-16-05. A/C: 11648705.

FORCES – IRAQ / VETERAN: £22,000 needed to clear debt ex-wife left! Help deeply appreciated. LloydsTSB, S/C: 30-93-55. A/C: 07645565.

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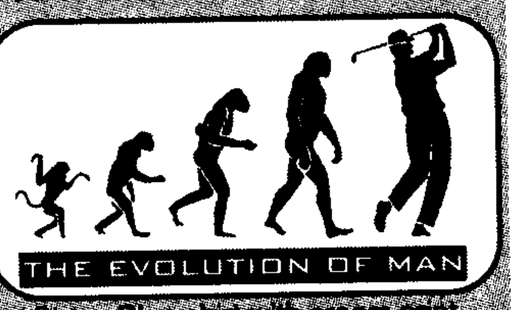

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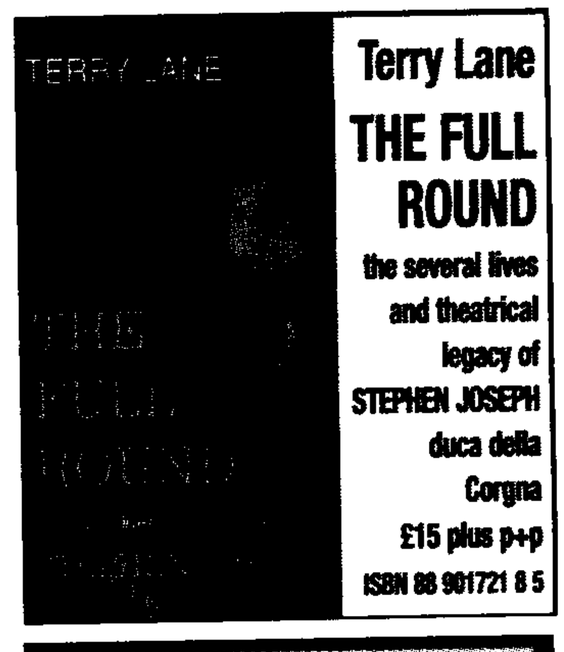

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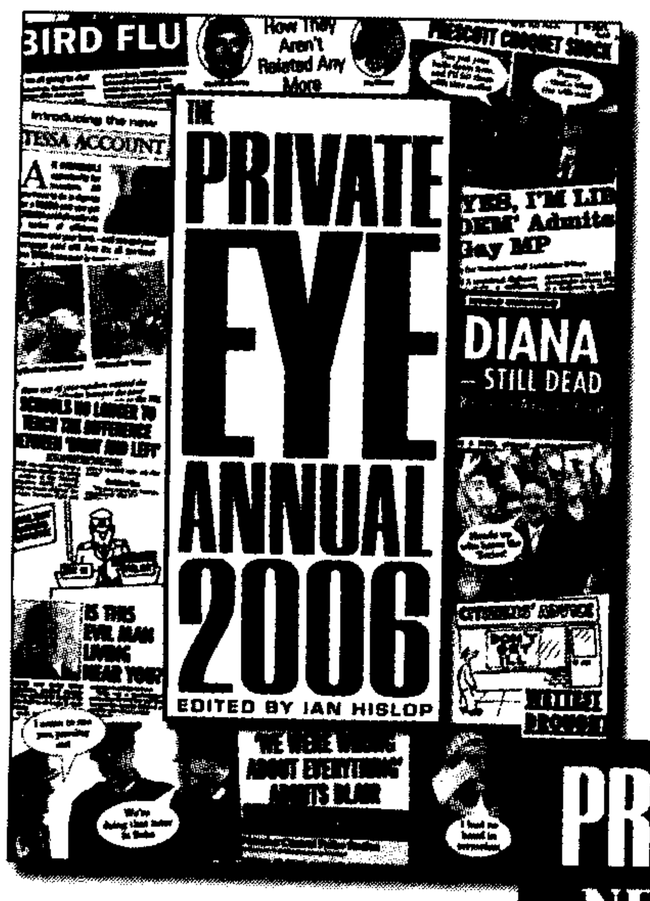

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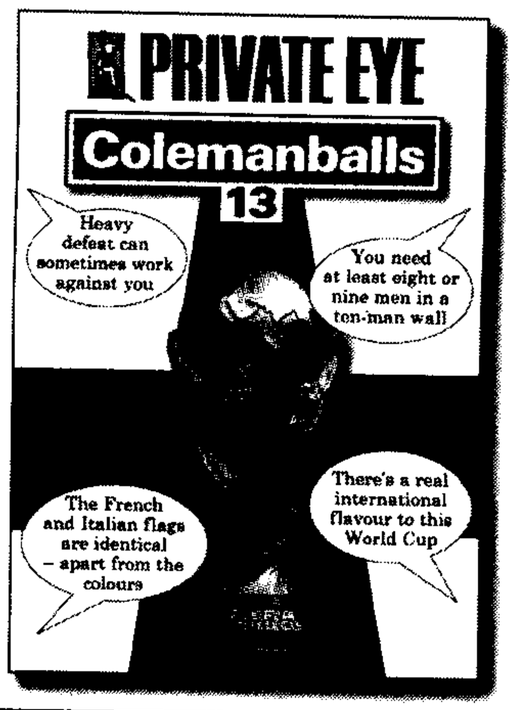
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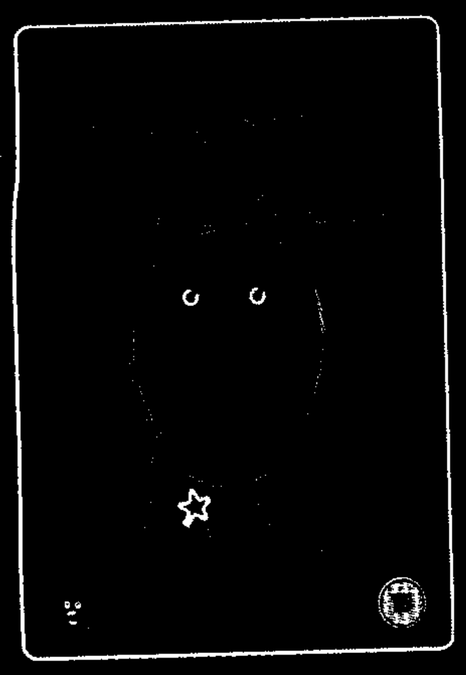

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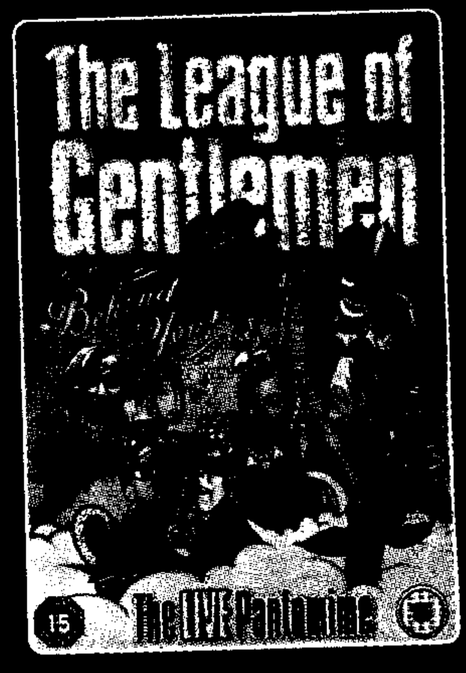

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